

GOBI OR SHAMO;

A Story of Three Songs.

BY

G. G. A. MURRAY.

"The great desert of Gobi or Shamo."

CORNWELL'S GEOGRAPHY.

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“To My Mother.

IN MEMORY OF MARAZION.”



GOBI OR SHAMO.

CHAPTER I.

THE highlands of Candia are melting away to the South ; the wind is astern and we can hardly feel it. Come, if you have an hour of leisure, and can forget for once your business and your bills, sail with me up over the crisp waves of the Aegean, and help to thread our way among those low grey islets to the North, from one or two of which we can just catch, reflected mistily, a gleam of the declining sun. It is not for any populous port that we are bound ; not the Piraeus nor Syra, nor that other town on the coast of Asia, which, so a recent examinee tells me, derives its name from the verb "smyrno," "to smell." We must resist those temptations, and take a more circuitous course, till we put to shore at the little old-world island of Arganthus. There is no one to see us, should we choose to land at the grass-grown jetty which the inhabitants call "the pier," and the more imaginative of them "the harbour." But a crowd will collect at once, as soon as the strange boat is seen, and, as seclusion is a more or less important matter with us, we had better try another landing. Suppose we go to that small broken cove lying hidden under the heights of the Holy Nicholas, and climb up those loose and crumbling rocks where old Lacrates of Psara, some sixty years ago, little lean bow-legged man with six

companions, climbed up, sword in teeth, and slew the Turkish sentinels, and summoned the startled islanders suddenly to deliver themselves. And so they did, till they had massacred every Turk in the garrison, and hung the two commanders, one each side, on the great cross that still towers in the Church square.

Here we are at the summit ; and can throw a glance inside the little Byzantine church, still alive with the memories of the Revolution, where a few devout Greeks are praying silently ; then pass on and turn to the left, till we come to a larger, finer building of a different style, which proves, if you decipher the inscription over the doorway, to be the library of the same Holy Nicholas. Were the porter a man of rigid conscience, he would forbid our entrance, on the ground that Mr. Mavrones must not be disturbed : were he even a good man of business, he might develop a scruple or two against admitting us, which would not be quieted for less than an equal number of drachmas. As it is, however, the good Anastasios is smoking cigarettes with a friend in the square hard by, and we can enter the library unnoticed. We find a long room with a vaulted roof, broadly arched windows, and a ceiling painted with blue and red, and gilt with a richness that must indeed have dazzled the eyes of students in the fifteenth century. Now the colours are dim and faded, and the whole room has an exquisite air of frailness and yet of majesty, something quiet and gentle pervading that which was once ugly in its self-assertion.

In the corner of the apartment is a young man poring over a large MS. with every appearance of industry and absorption. Yet, if you go close enough, you will see that it is not the contents of the MS. that he is studying, but only the back, and that seem-

ingly not a back of any particular interest ; there are no jewels nor fine illuminations, and the parchment itself is very discoloured,—yellow, stained with smudges of dingy grey. There is not much to be made out of a thing like that : and it really seems inexcusable in that studious-looking young man, who has not noticed our entrance, to spend his time dreaming over the covers of his MS. instead of reading what is inside.

The Library was once attached to a monastery, but now the monks have ceased to exist,—massacred by the Turks, the Arganthians say,—and St. Nicholas, like a prudent speculator, has turned his property into an hotel. This new walk of life seems more adapted to the genius of the Holy Man, than his old pursuits were. It was never a very good monastery : but the Hotel, for a house of its kind, is beyond praise. It is a fair reward for anything the saint may have suffered of old, to be able now to sit with a proprietor's pride in a garden like this ; and whenever the celestial harp grows heavy in his hands, to fly quietly back to earth and enjoy the view from his own veranda, looking down over the lawns, bright with oleander and magnolia, that slope to that rippling mirthful sea. Apparently the saint is away just now : the only occupants of the veranda are that dark young lady with the white muslin gown and red shawl, and, standing close by her, the tall strongly-built man, whose back is turned towards us.

"O yef," he was saying—and that word, by the way, was an indication to those who knew Lord Strathbourne, that he was interested in the conversation. Final S was the first of his letters to give way ; if he got excited, R followed suit and changed into either W or Gh ; when he really lost his temper he

was unintelligible to the most accomplished phonologist. For instance, on the celebrated occasion when he accused an Irish member of calling him a "slimy slanderer," he so lost himself in the liquids and sibilants of those two words, that the patriot's only defence was: "Verily, sor, I have it not in me, to; projuice such noises with mee lips!"

It is little use trying to represent his pronunciation in writing.

"O yef, it's all very well to make patriotism the chief of all the virtues, but surely you can't admire a man like Locrates?"

"Most surely I can. What do you object to in Locrates? Would you have had him provide the Turks with boats and passports for Constantinople?"

"No, but he could have prevented the massacres."

"Why, he saw that the war was a war of extermination and nothing less. If he had left those Turks alive, we should have been living under the Turks to-day."

"But hanging those people on the cross—it was the act of a savage."

"Not at all. It was a convenient place. Besides it was partly a religious war."

He calmed himself with a praiseworthy effort, and replied in his ordinary manner:

"But can you imagine your ideal patriot—can you imagine your grandfather, for instance, hanging his enemies on a cross?"

"It was not a faultless act; no great acts are. But it was much better than you or I or any ordinary people would be capable of. Of course it shews the fierceness of Locrates' nature, but it shows he was wonderfully brave and devoted all the same."

“But just think of the man’s character before. Hachette’s guide says he was a regular thief, and. . . .”

“Not at all: it says he was ‘*un brigand des plus pittoresques*.’ When the war broke out he stopped his piracy. He was like Karaïskakes and many others: the need of entire devotion to Greece struck them like a revelation, and changed their lives altogether.”

She was speaking excitedly by this time. The Englishman was dismayed. Enthusiasm always roused him; and besides, he was afraid of annoying her by persistent whiggery. She paused for a few moments, and then continued:

“The fact is, ~~you don’t understand~~ what patriotism means; no one can, unless there is a chance of his being called any day to sacrifice everything for his country, unless there is a great enemy constantly threatening. . . .”

“I can understand it when I see it in you, Miss Botzares, and I feel. . . .”

“My name is Clearista, Lord Strathbourne, when you are speaking about patriotism.”

The noble lord’s consonants gave way with a rush:

“When I fee you, K’earithta, I do underthtand what pat’iotithm may be at itht highetht. I feel it’t beyond me, above my capabilitive. . . . But you know. . . .”

“There, you have apologised. ‘Go and keep your engagement with the professor. You are half-an-hour late.’”

“By Dthove, fo I am: I mutht wush!” said Lord Strathbourne, looking at his watch. “Good-bye,” and so saying he departed hastily, with a certain dissatisfaction and uneasiness of manner.

Lord Strathbourne was, as you may have guessed from his conversation, an English Liberal, a fine-looking, red-whiskered man, rather over thirty, who had come to Greece with a confused belief that the nation did not get its proper share of political attention, and that he might as well make himself an authority on the state of the country, and encourage patriotism too—to a judicious extent.

To encourage patriotism is often a dangerous practice: but Clearista was a peculiarly agreeable patriot to encourage. She impressed the Englishman's imagination deeply and alarmed him not a little. She had such vehement and passionate views about the Turkish question—she felt sure they were really unsound at the bottom, but the worst of it was that they generally seemed logical. And then she was so startlingly talented. She conversed with ease, it appeared to him, on any topic in the world, and that in a foreign tongue. For she spoke English with an accent that sounded only like a more graceful pronunciation, and her mistakes, which were rare, were chiefly due to a too extensive knowledge of the language. Recondite proverbs garnished her conversation, except when she was really moved or interested: and the first intimation Lord Strathbourne had had of her foreign origin, was when she asked him at breakfast: "Please tell the varlet I will not have a full cup, but about a noggin."

So the Englishman departed, thinking of Clearista's virtues and his dinner with the professor, and then came thoughts of Clearista's grandfather and the liberties of Greece: and finally, as his hasty walk heated him, rose an overmastering desire to—the fashion and buy two dozen turn-down collars:—a desperate project, which his calmer self condemned.

She sat on the veranda still in the great cane chair, looking down towards the sea, in front of which a figure was walking to and fro somewhat restlessly on the sloping lawn. If you looked longer at this restless walker, you would recognise the young man we saw in the library. Absent-minded now as he was then, he had taken no part in the *tête-à-tête* in the veranda, and did not observe, now, that the Englishman was gone, and Clearista sitting alone and watching him. Yet he might well have observed. Her graceful pose in the great chair was alone enough to attract an artist's eye. She was one of those people who are always graceful, not because they consciously avoid ~~strained attitudes~~, but by reason of the rhythmical in their limbs, graceful like a deer or a tiger. And beyond this, she was decidedly beautiful, in a strange foreign style of beauty. A complexion uniformly parchment-coloured, yet of exquisite delicacy, contrasted with a sort of halo of dark hair: a straight fine nose scarcely rising above the face; rather high cheek bones, and narrow eyes of a sparkling and burning darkness—that is a rough catalogue of her features, and about as expressive as catalogues generally are.

Such was Clearista Botzares; but her beauty was only a tenth of her charm. Every well-informed person in Arganthos, and in Athens too, for that matter, knew of her learning and her patriotism; had heard of her journey to the North of Greece, to nurse the wounded insurgents on the Macedonian frontier; and had read that eloquent pamphlet about the same insurrection which appeared in Athens with the signature "Clearista." For it was part of her system to discard her second name and bear only one, like the great Greeks of old—a small piece of pedantry,

which her friends liked her all the better for. Certainly few people would have cared to disown such a surname as hers, and she herself would not like the story forgotten, how her grandfather earned that surname by saving the life of the redoubtable Suliot, Nothi Botzares. It is a wonderful tale and varies in every mouth—except indeed in that of the old man himself. He is hard to draw out upon the subject, but, when he does open his lips, and his granddaughter is not by to check him, he takes a certain pleasure in revealing the scamy side of his great deed. It was all more or less of a mistake, he would give you to understand: he had no idea that he was in a post of danger, or he ~~would never have~~ gone there: and as for his killing the two Turks—why he was so startled that he let off his gun without looking, and somehow managed to shoot somebody: and then he picked up Botzares' body and ran home as fast as he could:—only some one knocked against him on the way and fell over a precipice in consequence. And after all, he would tell you, he never cared much about the Greeks. He would never have joined the Revolution at all, only he had been sent by his father to sell a cargo of hides in the Levant, and was caught and made a soldier of, on his way home. And home he went as soon as the fighting was done, and would have liked to stay there till now if it had not been for Clearista.

But Clearista was not thinking of her grandfather's youth: she was getting tired of sitting still with nobody to talk to. "Mr. Mavrones," she called.

The figure walking by the sea stopped and turned towards her.

"Do you know you have been turning your back on

me for the last quarter of an hour, and left me with no one to speak to?"

"I was thinking about my MSS.," said Mavrone with a smile.

As he walks leisurely towards the veranda, we catch the outline of his short curly hair, and slight figure; and now that he is close by we can make out his face clearly enough to know him again. The sort of man one likes at first sight: his features have an exceptional regularity which marks him for a Greek, no less than the ease and friendliness of his manner. There is a look of frankness in his eyes, and at the same time that curious expression of physical suffering which is said often to go with strong hope and patience.

"I was thinking about my MSS.; and besides, I thought St. Nicholas was entertaining you."

"It was not St. Nicholas, as you call him, but Lord Strathbourne. We had a discussion about Lacrates—I think I rather shocked him."

"You stuck up for Lacrates through thick and thin I suppose?"

"Yes, wouldn't you?"

"More or less; I fancy when a man is capable of any great act of devotion—when he once gets inspired with real patriotism—it is only a question of time for his vices to die out."

"At any rate one can excuse them."

"That is not what I mean. I mean that a really noble enthusiasm strangles out small faults and pieces of selfishness. If you contrast . . . but I am quite ashamed. Fancy my lecturing *you* about patriotism. I thought to sit at your feet."

A shade passed over Clearista's face.

"Ah, don't speak of me as a patriot . . . but at

any rate come in out of the night air—as you say in England, ‘Baith midge and mutton. maun house against a gale.’ ”

She had been speaking in Greek: but now she turned to English, under the temptation of the proverb—such a rare proverb as it was, known perhaps to her and the German compiler of her “*Ausführliche Sprichwortsammlung*” alone in all the world, outside the very selectest circles of English society!

“I am neither a midge nor a mutton,” said Mavrones as he came into the veranda: “I’m shut up in the library all day, and like the night air.”

“How devoted you are to those MSS. What is the charm about them?”

“A charm you can’t describe to one who hasn’t felt it. You should come and collate with me some day.”

“But what comes of it all, what result is there?”

“Well, scholarship, like virtue and most other good things, is its own reward. But there is the chance of great discoveries as well.”

“I can understand that once there was a great deal to discover, before the big libraries had been properly examined, but now. . . .?”

“Even now perhaps one may sometimes discover a treasure.”

“Perhaps; but did you ever know any one who discovered a treasure? Have you ever done so yourself?”

A vivid flush came over the young man’s face.

“Possibly,” he said, “I scarcely know; but there is some hope. . . .”

“Why, then, you *have* discovered something! How exciting! Do tell me what it is.”

“I can’t say yet. It may be nothing. The evidence is small, and the deduction I want to make enor-

mous. It would startle even you," he added with a smile.

"You're piquing my curiosity. Should I understand if you explained to me?"

"Understand! Of course you would, but I hardly think. . . ."

"How do you do to-morrow, my sister?" cried a loud cheery voice, with a strong Levantine accent, proceeding from the brilliant figure which rushed in at that moment under the archway.

Clearista turned quickly. "Ah, my brother! I am glad you have come," she cried, rising from her chair; "Mr. Mavrones, let me introduce Mozep Kiarsk, an old playmate of mine, so old, that we call each other brother and sister."

"I am very pleased to meet Mr. Kiarsk," said Mavrones. Kiarsk bowed with a puzzled expression, and the brilliance seemed to have departed for the moment even from his eyes and rings. No need to detail the conversation that ensued. The poor man was not a clown; he was only a Levantine commercial traveller, and his English, what there was of it, was confined to what may be called the "extreme colloquial" order. He soon shone again: and, though Mavrones was a little dull, found no difficulty in making conversation for three. He was, like all his class, fat in face and body: garfulous, self-satisfied, and in a way handsome. The usual red *tarbouche* never left his head, not even at meal times. He had had but one serious grief in his life, and one great joy. The former arose from a duel between two friends of his, in which he should have acted as second: but when he appeared on the field clad in an embroidered waistcoat and light check coat, with a flower in the button-hole, the two principals were so disgusted at the levity and want of

taste displayed by this costume, that they refused to fight, and Mozep's reputation as a man of the world was practically blasted. The compensating joy was a small Arab horse with an enormous tail; a present from one of the above-mentioned duellists after his reconciliation to Kiarsk. It was a grey horse; but for distinction's sake, Mozep had the tail dyed flame-colour.

He had learnt this device in Syria, and was justly proud of it. There was probably some occult reason for choosing that particular colour rather than a common blue or green: for Mozep was superstitious to an amazing degree. The beliefs of his native village would have been more than enough for a faith of ordinary capacity; but for him they were miserably inadequate. So he went on his travels, in the spirit of ancient Greece or Rome, assimilating all the local superstitions he could find, till the mass of minute rules and omens which regulated his conduct grew too unwieldy for any mind, except that of an Oriental Christian, to carry.

The most noteworthy of his other characteristics was omniscience, a gift the Cherubim have usually denied to mortal man, with the exception of a few commercial travellers. He had no awkwardness or reserve. His anecdotes ran quickly through Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, and deepened in interest as they approached the less known regions of Western Europe. He had got as far as Portugal when a break occurred. He was describing an adventure of his in Lisbon; how a horse had bolted with him in a trap, down the long street with the acacias by the water's edge: what a vicious, what a strong, what an ingenious horse it was; and what remarkable presence of mind on his part had averted what appeared inevitable death. "I saw, my

dear friend, that three minutes more would bring us over the edge of the wharf: there was not a moment to lose. I ordered my companion—there was a lady with me—to sit still and pray to St. George:—I drew my revolver, crossed myself, and fired calmly at the horse's neck. Ah, my dear friend! He gave a desperate plunge, staggered on some thirty paces, and fell dead. We had stopped within a yard of the brink—Ah, what say you, my Mavrones?"

Mavrones started. "I beg your pardon—yes certainly. I think I must go and send a telegram to England."

"Telegraph my adventure to the *Times*!—is it possible!" thought Mozep Kiarsk in a wave of exultation.

"Ah, your discovery," said Clearista. "It seems very absorbing."

"Yes," answered Mavrones, "it is. I have a clue here which I ought to follow. It will make it necessary for me to leave Arganthus for the East as soon as I can. I am telegraphing to a friend in England to join me."

The *Times* still ran in Kiarsk's head: perhaps this was only a feint on Mavrones' part: in any case, he might be induced to telegraph to the *Times* also with a little persuasion.

"Capital, my Mavrones," he said, with the affectionate vagueness usual in Levantine lips. "I will show you the way."

"Do," said Mavrones, and they started together. They had not quite crossed the lawn towards the old monastic gateway, when Clearista suddenly rose from her chair, and, after a moment's hesitation, called after them:

"Mozep, come back a moment. I want you to get me some stamps."

Mozep trotted back to the veranda, and waited silently for instructions.

"Well, my sister?" he enquired, after a pause; but Clearista looked a little embarrassed, and merely said

"O, after all, it doesn't really matter. I only wanted——"

Mozep smiled. "You wanted me to see what was in the telegram? Certainly, my sister. You may trust me, but I would have looked in any case."

Fraternal naïveté had gone too far. "Why should I want you to see Mr. Mavrone's telegram?" she asked pointedly. "I have told you I don't want anything; why do you keep him waiting?"

So saying, she settled herself disdainfully into her big cane chair, and left Mozep to shrug his shoulders and wonder what had suddenly made Clearista so scrupulous, as he ran back to join his companion. He determined to read the telegram for his own edification, at any rate.

Some half hour after they had left the precincts of St. Nicholas, an old man of about eighty years came in through the same gateway, and walked rather wearily towards the hotel. He was a tall though thick-set man; his brain seemed to have wasted more than his body.

"Grandfather," cried Clearista, "have you seen Mozep? He arrived this afternoon."

"Has he come?" said the old man, brightening. "That is good news. Well done, my Mozep! Where is he? Does he look well?"

"He has gone to the post with Mr. Mavrone. I should say he looks remarkably well—Grandfather!" she added, after a pause.

"Well, Clearista?"

"Mozep called me his sister, and I had to explain his speech away."

The old man seemed hurt, but apparently did not know how to answer. He took a chair, and sat still for a minute, before he said :

"It is disowning your own blood, Clearista. It is disowning your own blood."

"Well, what could I do? You know I am very fond of Mozep—very fond indeed; but I simply cannot say he is my brother. If he had only changed his name and his looks——"

"Well, of course, I don't wish to interfere, but I never could see why you shouldn't confess your nationality like anyone else; I don't like it."

"Well, you know my motives. If you disapproved, you should have said so at first. It is too late now."

"But you never disowned him at Athens."

"Everyone knew I was not a Greek there. But for the last six years——"

The old man was not equal to a protracted battle.

"I don't mind it myself," he said feebly. "I am quite willing to stay here and pretend to be a Greek or an Englishman, or anything you like. But I am sorry for Mozep. Couldn't you say he was a Greek too?"

"Grandfather! Who would believe me? Just think of his accent and his appearance, and his manners, and the way he rides, and how he boasts of his eyesight, and—Oh, everything! Besides, it's done now, and can't be helped."

"Well, my daughter, you know best, of course, but we mustn't hurt Mozep's feelings."

"I wouldn't hurt his feelings for the world. But I really cannot go and say to these Englishmen, 'Allow me to introduce my brother—a wild Tartar, turned

bagman. Yes, I am a Tartar too—so is my grandfather. Of course, we said we were Greeks, and were very patriotic. No doubt, but you mustn't lay too much stress on statements like that. They come naturally to us—in fact we have not spoken the truth for some months.' ”

Again she was exciting herself by her own words. She had cowed her grandfather at the first outburst, but continued for the sake of hurting her own feelings. Now she stopped abruptly.

“I am worrying you, grandfather. You must go in and lie down. I'll send Mozep to talk it over with you, but you really may trust me in an affair like this.”

“You know Mozep is very sensitive,” remonstrated old Botzarçs feebly, but at this moment the subject of the dispute appeared with Mavrones at the gate. The young man ran with delight to his grandfather, and kissed him effusively on both cheeks.

Mavrones came leisurely towards the veranda.

“Well, you have sent your telegram?” said Clearista. “If you can telegraph your secret, you might tell it to your friends,” she added with a smile; “though, of course, I have no wish to hear it if you don't approve.”

“I didn't telegraph my secret; I only asked my friend to call here with his yacht. . . . and I really don't see why you should call it a secret.”

“I call it a secret because you don't tell me what it is.”

“Well, there is really very little to tell, and I am almost ashamed to speak to you of the hopes I am giving way to.”

“Pray don't be so modest,” remarked Clearista parenthetically.

"You would think my project a wild goose chase. Besides I should not like it to get abroad, before I know whether there is any prospect of success."

Clearista was annoyed beforehand, and this implicit mistrust stung her.

"Ah!" she said, "you are afraid I should make it a subject of conversation for St. Nicholas and the Table d'hôte! I will say no more about it."

Mavrones was struck with penitence for his foolish speech. He had no intention to say he distrusted her: he did not think, on reflection, that he did distrust her. He had merely felt a reluctance to reveal a cherished hope which the practical world would certainly condemn as quixotic. However, there was no help now: as Clearista might have said, on the authority of her German proverb book: "It is wankie work to piece a broken brick." To-morrow, no doubt, he would have an opportunity of soothing her feelings: he would even tell her the whole "secret" at a pinch.

She had passed straight up the veranda to Mozep, who was still talking to his grandfather. Interrupting them brusquely, she asked:

"Well, what was in the telegram?"

Mozep had his own reasons for thinking meanly of that despatch; but he was pleased to see that his sister's morbid scruples had given way, even though it was only anger that had conquered them.

"Ah, mother of God, my sister, it was an odd telegram certainly—most odd. It ran like this:" and he wrote the words down on the back of an envelope.

"Baj Glop Salop Yacht Arganthos immediately."

She looked at it with severe scorn.

"Mozep, how can you be so intensely stupid. "Baj Glop Salop—" that is no sense, not English nor any

other language. I wish you would be more careful, or at least avoid wilful inventions!"

"By St. Olga, my. . . ." he began in astonishment, but Clearista had already turned away and was going inside the house. She considered that everybody was behaving abominably—her grandfather making those perverse difficulties about her plans; Mavrones calmly telling her she was not to be trusted, and, then, that stupid Mozep expecting her to believe such nonsense as this. In such a frame of mind she walked on to her bedroom, passing with icy neglect a little dog, who came wagging his tail at the foot of the stairs in expectation of an affectionate greeting. It was cruel doubtless to hurt the little beast's feelings; but reflect, gentle reader, whether you and I do not know people who would very probably under the circumstances have given it a kick. Clearista went on to her room and shut herself in, and mused upon various melancholy subjects, chiefly the defects of her own character. For she was one of those people, who, when the ordinary course of circumstances makes them unhappy, end by imputing everything to their own imperfections and vices. She could retaliate effectively at the moment of attack; but her after-broodings always took the form of self-reproach. This time, to be sure, the reproach was not undeserved. She had certainly lost her temper and been rude to Mozep; she had been as inquisitive as a silly school-girl about Mr. Mavrones' discovery; she had shown pitiable weakness in asking Mozep what was in the telegram, after the high tone she had taken half-an-hour before; and, worst of all, she reflected, her whole life was dishonest from beginning to end, and she was forced into new falsehoods so continually, that they were becoming quite natural to her. She was a false,

unscrupulous woman, and, what was worse, sure to be found out sooner or later by these Englishmen who now looked upon her as something between a heroine and a saint.

Poor thin-skinned, innocent-hearted, arch-impostor.

CHAPTER II.

ANXIOUS as Clearista may have been to know the contents of the telegram, she would scarcely have cared to wade through the long letter that Mavrone wrote that night, and directed with the same mysterious formula which had excited her incredulity towards Mozep, and brought down her wrath upon that brilliant and unoffending head. Yet, reader, if you wish to learn the history of all these people, you must plod your way through that difficult epistle. With no further delay we will quietly open the envelope addressed "Quentin Baj Esq., Glop, Salop, England," and read what Clearista called "the secret."

"Arganthus, Friday.

"DEAR BAJ,

"I write to explain my telegram which must have surprised you. The fact is, I believe I have made a discovery in the Library here, quite by accident, of overwhelming importance. I am so excited about it, I dare not make any further comment. Here are the facts.

"With the exception of the Anthology at which I am working, the MSS. here are mostly ecclesiastical and of little value. As I was turning over a number of them, with a view to comparing the texture of the parchment, one codex, containing selections from Basil, Gregory and Chrysostom, happened to attract my notice to its cover. The cover was parchment, not in good condition, size 10 inches by 18; there were marks of writing upon it. The letters are the most

Indistinct I have ever read ; however, I have made out nearly all of it, and enclose a transcription.

“The words of Hegesias, son of Arges, envoy to the Hellenes in Europe from the Hellenes in the land of the Sanni : Seeing that death is upon me, and it is just that I should follow my nine companions whom the Turks have slain, I have written these words and given them to Achmedos the muleteer, to deliver to the rulers of the Hellenes in Europe : whom, if through his own fault he fail in his promise, Zeus Horkios blast and uproot, himself and his wife and his children, and all his house ; but if he is faithful, the reverse of this. For the public papers which we brought from home were burnt by the Turks in the same fire that burnt my companions.

“We are the sons of those Ionians who were taken by Darius after the revolt, and some sent to Bactria to work as slaves, but the Milesians to Ampesa by the Erythrean sea. Now five generations after this the Milesians fled secretly Northward to join the other Ionians in Bactria and Sogdiana. And they found them flourishing greatly, and still a separate people, speaking the language and wearing the dress of the Hellenes, but hated and plotted against by all the barbarians. Then it seemed good to them in Bactriana, fearing that the barbarians would inform the king that the Milesians had fled, and that all the Hellenes would be given over to the barbarians to slay, to fly from the kingdom of the Persians, Northward and Eastward, over the great mountains that lie by the sources of the Indus and Oxus, and to settle. . . .”

“That is the end of the first column : the parch-

ment has been cut short to fit the book it was intended to bind. The next column begins:—

“called the Charaxi against them. And they have fought for eighty years and six and are like to be destroyed. For they dwell in ‘a rock that is the mother of fire, and mists of driving snow and bright ice are set about it as a crown for ever’: and the Charaxi besiege them round about, myriads upon myriads, and cease not summer nor winter, night nor day. And the Sanni, who dwell on the mountain, are very fierce and take part with the Charaxi.

“Wherefore were we sent, ten ambassadors to ask aid from the Hellenes in Europe, and, if perchance they would help us, to guide them home. But we found the Hellenes in Europe slaves and not free, and a worse foe destroying them. And they have slain my companions, and me they have tortured till I am like to die.

“But if ever the Hellenes are free again, or if any seek to escape this slavery, and help their brethren against the Charaxi, there are two ways to the mountain where we live. Either sail by the Erythrean sea, round the Chersonese of the Indians, till you reach the delta. . . .”

“End of the second column: the third begins:

“not the Ganges, but another great river flowing from the East, and sail on continually past the hills, till you come to a large city where there is a golden palace on a hill outside the walls, and the houses are built of sheep’s and oxen’s horns, and the name of the city is Psychopolis. Then journey northwards 200 *mekaiā* up to the highest ridge of the first range of

mountains: go by night to the peak, being wary of the cold, which kills all living things, and look to the North and East: and far off you will see a great beacon fire burning on a peak. It will burn every night for twenty years, or until we are captured: and that is where the Hellenes dwell. But the land between is desert and full of robbers, and the cold freezes men to death, and the tribes of the shepherds are very fierce. This way only a strong army can go.

"The other way is to sail past the Indians to the Chersonese called Golden, and then along the coasts of the Sineës to one of their great cities: there go as suppliants to the king of the Sineës, and shew him the token which is tied to this scroll; he will give a free passage through all the dominions of the Sineës to the Hot Lake, and beyond the Hot. . ."

"Here for the third time the writing is cut off at the bottom of the parchment. There are only three columns, and the writing is only on one side. The letters are so faint I should never have noticed them, but that I happened to look at the MS. in a strong sunlight. The custodian of the Library knew nothing about the matter, and rather poohpooched the idea of deciphering the writing at all; so I have not taken him into confidence. The date of the MS. itself is given as 1438: Hegesia's parchment must of course be much earlier. It would not be used for binding till the letters were a good deal blurred. On the other hand, he must have come to Greece after the first invasion of Europe by the Turks, from the way he speaks of our slavery. By the way, I doubt if he ever got to Greece proper: or why should he have a mul-
teer with a Moslem name, Achmet? There are two other dates that struck me. The Ionians were taken

captive by Persia B.C. 494: the Milesians in Ampesa—he obviously means the place Greek writers call Ampe—fled according to this document five generations later: say B.C. 350. If they had waited twenty years more, Alexander would have been in Bactria, and they would have found themselves among their countrymen.

“Again you must notice that the description of the mountain where the people live is clearly a quotation from a lyric poet: “a rock the mother of fire, etc.”

πέτραν πυρὸς ματέρ', ἀμφὶ τὰν αἰεὶ⁶
κρυσταλλολαμπεῖς νιφοβλάτες ἔρεψαν αἶμοί.

“I believe that quotation can be identified. The word αἶμοί is quoted by Hesychius, Suidas, and I think some⁶ one else, from Aeschylus' ‘Aetnaeans.’ Suidas says it means ‘dew or mist,’ which is obviously right: all scholars have followed Hesychius who makes it—‘bushes, thickets.’ Again the language is certainly old Greek, and quite unlike Hegesias' dialect; the style too seems to me Aeschylean. We have therefore a fragment of the ‘Aetnaeans.’

“Do you see what this involves? The ‘Aetnaeans’ was not acted till long after the captivity of the Ionians; yet they apparently had knowledge of it. The conclusion must be that they kept up their intercourse with Greece in some way or other even from Ampesa.

“I think there is every chance of our finding all kinds of early Greek literature preserved among these people, if they are still in existence themselves. The careful way they seem to have preserved their language up to the beginning of the fifteenth century at any rate: the fact of their getting hold of the Aetnaeans at all: and, most especially, the introduction

of a quotation into a document so terribly serious and simple as this dying testimony of Hegesias, all shew a highly developed appreciation of literature. We may find—but of course you can imagine as well as I, can, what we may find.

“However, I think it is clearly our duty to start for the country this paper describes as soon as we can, and that without letting people in general know of our expedition. It is a great misfortune that the token he speaks of, which would get us a free passage from the Emperor of China—he, I presume, is the King of the Sincës—is lost, and no trace of it left behind. It must have been attached to the bottom of the parchment which has been cut off, and of course there is no guessing where it may have got to by this time. The MS. was written, not at Arganthus, but at Nauplia; so that even a sifting of Arganthian dust heaps, many of them, doubtless, four hundred years old, and a dredging of the Aegean, would not insure our getting it back again. I suppose without this token there is no possibility of getting through China: even if we had it, the government might not care to redeem a pledge of four centuries back.

“Our only course, then—I have taken it for granted that you will come with me; the prospect is worth any sacrifice—our only course will be to go ‘up the other great river running from the East,’ which is not the Ganges. This, I take it, must be the Brahma-pootra. Psychopolis, the city it leads to, seems a translation of the name Lha-Ssa: the Grand Lama’s golden palace and the houses built of horn, point to the same conclusion. There will be a good deal of danger. The hill tribes would, I suppose, probably kill any Englishman they found in their country; in Thibet no Europeans, least of all English, are allowed;

beyond Lha-ssa we shall have the Mongol nomads to deal with, and, no doubt, brigands as well. We must adopt some disguise and travel as secretly as possible; I even fancy we had better run on foot by night and hide during the day; but that point we can discuss later. The journey from the safe parts of British India to the mountain range from which the beacon is visible, is at least 1,000 miles; what 200 *mekaia* are, I have no idea.

"I am sending an account of the MS. and of our project to my father; he is sure to approve, but I am afraid he is too old to come with us. Further details can be arranged when you arrive here. Bring a collapsible boat—they are always useful. Interview the authorities about my fellowship; tell them that I am pursuing philological studies in Higher Asia, and shall not be able to return for several months. Get some money advanced. Come as quickly as you can.

"Yours,

"MAVRONES."

Mayrones closed the letter, and turned his chair towards the open window. The world seemed to have lost its reality for him since his great discovery. A casual observer would have said he was living in a dream, but the truth was exactly the reverse. The thoughts and occupations that filled his days were the opposite of dreams, not less vivid, but far more vivid than ordinary waking life. Yet this did seem a wild enterprise after all; a thousand miles on foot over mountains and deserts, where every man might be your mortal enemy. Even for an ordinary traveller, for a Mongol or Thibetan, who had no need to hide, who had his camels and yaks and regular provisions, the journey

was one of appalling difficulty. Granted that no one discovered him on the way, a traveller on foot was almost certain to die of cold or hunger. But then the prize was so dazzling. He would have risked his life gladly to find one single history or drama of the fifth century before Christ; but this prize was greater than a hundred fresh MSS. The exiles were sure to have preserved all kinds of priceless remnants of the old literature; that was the one point on which he felt assured. But if they preserved their literature, why not their art? Should he find another Parthenon, and market places with statues and sculptured marble? Perhaps there would be paintings as well; that would be the most interesting discovery of all, to find what like those pictures were, which have perished so utterly, and left only the praises of old critics to remind us that they ever existed. There would be music too, and doubtless fresh poetry called forth by the sufferings of this nation of exiles, the poetry of Greeks chastened by affliction and endurance, and taught the greatness of the world by long pilgrimage—it might be the finest ever sung by man. . . .

How do people run by night in deserts? It would be absolutely necessary to get some hints from an expert before starting. Possibly there was literature upon the subject. He thought he remembered the title of a French book, *Impressions d'un Voyage à pied de Paris à St. Pétersbourg, la Police en poursuite; par un Assassin.* No doubt that would contain useful information. In Tartary at any rate there would be no police in pursuit. As long as he was not noticed, nobody would try to discover him. . . . After all, they could probably take camels most of the way. It would only be in case of particular danger that running by night would have to be tried for a

day or two. Besides, provisions would be a difficulty if they went without camels. There might be grain or roots, but buying sheep would be scarcely safe, and stealing them, not much more so. What would be the weight of, say, two hundred skins of essence of beef? He wondered if he was strong enough for the journey. At any rate Baj was as strong as an elephant, so that even if he should sink by the way, Baj could reach the end. What a moment that would be, for some one, when he stood on the peak where the old beacon fire had burnt so many years, burnt fruitlessly, a signal to friends who never came. . . . Or had anyone gone to the rescue after all? It was just possible—perhaps some band of knights errant from conquered Greece had actually fled from the Turk away eastward, sailed down the Erythrean sea and beyond the Chersonese of the Indians, toiled through the melting heat and intolerable cold, made a way by arms or stealth through the heart of moving Tartar hordes, and caught at last from the crags of ice, where the frost killed all living things, the gleam of that sleepless beacon far away in the north. It might be so; if Hegesias' message ever reached Greek hands, some one surely would have attempted the expedition and yet, surely, in that case the letter of Hegesias would be a well-known historical document, not a thing so despised and neglected that an economical bookseller could use it as old parchment to cover a MS. and cut it down ruthlessly to the size he found convenient. No—no doubt as the nine envoys had died by Turkish fire, so Hegesias had died from his wounds, all alike neglected. And his dying testament had been neglected too, ridiculed at first, probably, as a madman's ravings, then not even ridiculed but forgotten, and at last sold as old parch-

ment. What a wonderful fortune had thrown this old parchment in Mavrones' way, and inspired him with the idea of deciphering it. He would be a degenerate Greek indeed, if he refused to obey the dead envoy's call.

If Mavrones had been less engrossed in his project, he would have noticed the voices that proceeded from the room almost opposite his, upon the other side of the passage. Clearista had intended Mozep's interview with her grandfather to remove the old man's scruples, and get rid at least of one great hindrance and annoyance which had made life so intolerable that evening. Clearista had her plans, and, it must be owned, they were chiefly of a predatory character. Now it is always a difficult and disagreeable task to carry on elaborate tactics for the exploitation of your neighbours, if your natural allies stand by, shaking their heads and commenting on the defects of your character. But it is much worse when the predatory tactics are quite unworthy of you: when you are secretly ashamed of them in your heart; and when, moreover, your critics will not grant you even the excuses which you deserve, poor sinner, but dare not ask for. Clearista had drifted half unconsciously into her present hypocrisy: her enthusiasm for Greece was real at the bottom, and being habitually taken for a Greek, she did not care to emphasize the fact that she came from a stock of low and ignorant barbarians. We are all more ashamed of our seedy patches than we have any need to be: Clearista felt her barbarian birth as keenly as many an English lady repines at the thought of her grandfather the small grocer. Besides this, the advance in social consideration which her hypocrisy procured, was a great prize for any sensitive and intellectual person: the alternative was, she

thought, something too horrible ; to marry a Tartar and live by the sea of Azov—the most stainless conscience would be dear at the price !

However she had confidence in Mozep's good sense and knowledge of the world : he would no doubt explain the matter to her grandfather's satisfaction. She was a little dismayed therefore, when a knock came at her bedroom door, and Mozep, accompanied by old Botzares, shunk apologetically into the room. She knew what that air of apology meant. When Clearista's relatives obeyed her they were happy and even proud : and they never disobeyed without shame and humiliation. The old man, immediately on entering, sat down in a small chair which happened to stand in a corner of the room, and which gave him the appearance of a naughty child. Mozep, who never trembled in the society of Pashas or employers, was afraid of his sister. To shew independence he lit a cigarette with exaggerated grace. "Pray sit down, Mozep," said Clearista with a touch of satire. Mozep felt he had made a bad beginning in not sitting down and taking the initiative at once. He took a chair, and plunged feebly into his subject.

"Grandfather thinks you ought to explain that I am your brother." He had prepared a less abrupt exordium for his speech, but fear unmanned him.

"Why so ?" asked she—a question apparently too difficult for Mozep, who looked to his grandfather for help.

"I won't deny my own flesh and blood," said the old man boldly : but his own daring frightened him, and his high tone sank as he went on. "I never did so yet, you know, Clearista, and I don't like to begin now that I am near my grave. Besides we must think of Mozep's feelings."

"Are your feelings much hurt, Mozep?" she asked...

"Well of course, my sister, if I thought any good would come of it, I should not mind, but I don't see. . ."

"Then let me assure you that good will come of it; so, as your feelings are not hurt, we need discuss the matter no further."

If Clearista had only been able to turn the subject here, she would have had a signal victory. Alas, she hesitated a moment and Mozep got his opportunity to start an entirely fresh attack.

"From the earliest times, my sister, man has been subjected by law divine to three institutions. . . ."

"Good Heavens, Mozep!"

"The family, which has reared in him, the sentiments of affection and obedience, the fatherland, which. . ."

"Mozep! are you going out of your mind? Grandfather, what is the matter with him?"

Kiarsk looked for encouragement to the old man, but seeing upon his face only an expression of blank bewilderment, resigned himself to defeat upon this point also, though to do so cost him a pang. In ordinary Levantine society the sudden introduction of the full flowers of eloquence in the middle of everyday talk, would doubtless have excited admiration and applause. But Clearista was too much engrained with European customs, and old Botzares was too simple-minded. To her the episode was merely ludicrous: to him it suggested some foreign refinement which made him uncomfortable because he did not understand it.

"Go on, tell us about man in the earliest times:" continued Clearista as Mozep paused: but Mozep

was not going to incur further humiliations. He was the best tempered man in the world, and took her ridicule easily, though certainly she did fall an inch or two in his estimation. He shrugged his shoulders :

"You know it is only Sophia's marriage that suggested this idea to you. And that was quite an exceptional affair—quite exceptional."

Clearista well remembered the tremor which had run through her school at Athens, the school where she was slightly disliked for her cleverness, and despised for her barbarian birth, at the discovery that Sophia, the patriotic, the high-minded Sophia, was suddenly missing : and the solemn awe which followed, when the news was whispered, that Sophia had eloped to Corinth with Sir Brown. Clearista had letters from her friend announcing their marriage at Corinth, and describing the virtues and charms of the English baronet. "It is not true that they beat their wives so much," said Sophia, "at least he has never once beaten me, though I wear a thick woollen vest as a precaution." After this came minute particulars of the proper way to address English baronets, and accounts of Sir Brown's wealth and munificence : he lived in two houses, one of which was some kind of castle or fortress, and he went from one to the other in a railway-train ! Then, Sophia detailed her plans for redeeming Northern Greece by means of these vast resources ; it would not be difficult, she knew for certain—in fact the courier had told her,—that the English army would follow Sir Brown anywhere ! Sophia was a real patriot ; and this, as Clearista saw, combined with moderate beauty and Greek birth, had fascinated the romantic young philhellene. It was a lesson, a hint, never to be forgotten.

All this passed through Clearista's mind as she replied:

"I know it was Sophia's marriage that first suggested it to me. But there are plenty of other reasons . . . and besides the question is not whether I had better pass for a Greek; that I have done already; but whether I am to go gratuitously to these people and confess myself a hypocrite."

Mozep shunned the issue.

"But the saints know, my sister, that you could by your own charms . . ."

"Nonsense, Mozep: no Englishman or Frenchman would dream of associating with a Tartar."

"I don't see why they shouldn't; they despise all foreigners equally, those western people."

"Sophia's case proves the contrary."

"Well, I don't see that you've been particularly successful as yet . . ."

"Haven't I raised our position in society? We can associate now with all the most interesting people in Greece . . ."

Clearista was gradually losing her head, while Mozep grew cooler and more business-like. He even dared to be brutal.

"Have any of these interesting people offered you their hands?"

"Mozep! I have never met a single one whom I should have allowed to . . ."

"There was an English merchant . . . What was his name? a millionaire . . . at Argos."

"Mr. Dubbin! Why he was the most vulgar and ignorant of them all . . . which is saying a good deal."

"Well Clearista, the interesting society into which you have lifted us, doesn't seem so charming after

all . . . if they were all vulgar and ignorant, and you couldn't tolerate any one of them as a husband."

"I didn't say they were all vulgar. Look at Lord Strathbourne and Mr. Mavrones . . ."

"Well, they have been here I don't know how long already and nothing has come of it."

The brutality of Mozep was almost too much to bear: but she faced it boldly and indignantly. She was not going to be cowed by mere plain speaking.

"I tell you, I can marry either of those two Englishmen in a fortnight! There! . . . at least I think so . . . I am not sure."

"You count Mavrones as an Englishman? I shouldn't think he was particularly rich."

"You will drive me mad, Mozep! As if I were simply going to sell myself for money! I would sooner marry a beggar I could really love, than one of your great heavy-jawed English, who would . . ."

"If that is so, my daughter," interrupted the old man slowly and with telling effect, "why do you pretend to be Greek at all, if it is not to marry one of these rich Englishmen?"

Clearista's position was still defensible: but she despaired of making herself understood, and capitulated without a blow.

"Well, I tell you, in a fortnight I can make my choice . . . If I'm not engaged by then, I'll go back to the sea of Azov with grandfather and not hurt your feelings any more."

"Don't be angry with me," said Mozep, "if you were really likely to marry this Lordos, I would gladly wait a month or more, but I can't help . . ."

She sprang up from her chair:

"Mozep you are too stupid this evening. I could

at this moment ring for the Lordos and tell him to make me an offer . . . I have only to . . .”

“Then, why, by the glory of God, don't you ring for him?” said Mozep.

The answer was a passionate burst of tears, from which the grandfather fled in astonishment and perplexity. Mozep, with a guilty conscience and a sudden return of his old timidity, looked helplessly round the room for fans and sal volatile, then slipped downstairs and searched for a maid, whom he sent up to his sister's room ; precisely the thing she would most have avoided under the circumstances.

CHAPTER III.

THE storm narrated in the last chapter resulted in a clearance of the air, and Mozep, conscious that his conduct towards Clearista had almost passed the limits of fraternal frankness, devoted himself to making amends. He brought her flowers and paid her compliments: he even ran on errands for her; and his conversational talents were always at her disposal for any purpose. The result was that Mozep beamed again: and his sister, as she sat in the summer-house some ten days after the conversation in the bedroom, felt for once as light and cheerful as the morning breeze that blew straight in her face from Euboea, and drove before it that graceful yacht which she was watching a few miles out to sea. She was pretending to read an interesting book, and was conscious of that profound state of moral well-being, which is said to be produced by a perfectly fitting dress. She was somewhat jarred therefore by the appearance of Mozep before her, Mozep flushed and important, with an expression of tragic enjoyment in his eye.

"Good morning, Mozep. How do you feel now?" Mozep had not got up to coffee, in him an alarmingsign.

"My bodily health is good, my sister," said he, with the implication of a terrific antithesis.

"And your soul . . . ?"

"Clearista, this is no time for mockery. We must leave this island at once."

"Well, what's the matter? Tell me all about it," she said with a cheerful lack of interest.

"It will be a great shock."

She felt a sudden misgiving ; was Mozep ruined by some speculation ? Or was her grandfather suddenly taken ill ?

"Come, be quick and let me hear it."

"Our friend Mavrones . . ." began Mozep slowly.

"What has happened ?" she cried, starting to her feet. "Do be quick."

"Our friend Mavrones . . . well, I regret to say, it is no longer possible for us to associate with that person."

"What do you mean ?"

"It happened like this, my sister. Last night just before getting into bed—I was rather late—St. Astaf prompted me to look out of the window.

"Why St. Astaf ?" she interrupted captiously.

"I had just been praying to him," said Kiarsk. It was true : even in ordinary society he was in the habit of constantly addressing internal prayers to a very choice selection of saints. Alone he prayed aloud ; in public he restrained his pious impulses, and those who noticed the slight movement of his lips, thought he was only swearing.

"I looked out," he continued ; "there was a noise of the gate clanking, and the porter suddenly put his head out with a light. Then I saw a figure leap like an arrow from the middle of the grassplot, and crouch down in the flower-bed near the wall. The porter apparently saw nothing ; he looked round once or twice, and then went in. The figure in the flower-bed looked cautiously about him, then ran noiselessly across the lawn and climbed like a wild beast up the post of the veranda. When he reached the roof, I heard him give a low laugh, and saw his teeth gleam like ivory in

the moonlight. He climbed in at the window at the end of the veranda. That window leads to Mavrones' room ; and the figure I saw was Mavrones' ! ”

• “ Well ? ”

“ Do you draw the same conclusion as I ? It is a terrible situation. . . . I must add that I am almost sure, though I could not make it out quite clearly, that his jaws were dripping with blood.”

“ What is there terrible in the fact that Mr. Mavrones got into his room through the window, when the front door was locked ? ”

“ Hush, my sister. Mavrones is no ordinary robber ; he would not steal out at night for any criminal purpose. . . ”

“ That is just what I say. . . ”

“ On the other hand, we know very little of his parentage, he passes the greater part of his day in solitude ; if you remember, he dislikes hunting—even the hunting of wolves. What is the obvious conclusion ? tell me with your own lips ! ”

“ I have not the faintest idea ; ” she said cheerfully. She was perfectly reassured by this time of the unimportance of Mozep's tragedy, and was intending to tease him a little for frightening her.

“ Think again ! ” Mozep had assumed a Napoleonic attitude of suppressed emotion.

“ Well, let me guess ;—solitude—objection to hunting wolves—perhaps he turns into a wolf himself when he's alone. Is that it ? ”

To her entire surprise, Mozep spread his arms in front of him like an orator at a climax, and answered :

“ You have divined the truth. Our friend Mavrones is a were-wolf ! ”

She could hardly credit him with being serious ; but reflection reminded her that this was not such an ex-

traordinary vagary for him as it would have been for other people. It was quite likely that her grandfather would take the same view. She answered in her usual tone :

"Well, upon my word ; in that case will you go to the Bazaar and get me a little vase to match the one in my room ?"

"What good will that do? We must leave the place."

"I have broken the other——"

"Yes, but with regard to Mavrones——"

"Oh, I should consult St. Astaf, if that is his name. . ."

"I have done so. I have vowed him thirty per cent. on the profits of my next transaction in silk. But the priest here, to whom I ought naturally to go——"

"Listen to me. You must not do anything of the kind. Very likely Mr. Mavrones is a were-wolf, if that pleases you, and you can do anything you like to protect yourself from him. But you mustn't make us all ridiculous by appealing to strangers for advice—and you mustn't annoy him."

"But, my sister, I cannot stay in a house. . . ."

"You had better think it over. Meantime will you go and get me the vase?"

"Well, but . . . I don't remember what your vases are like. Will you show me the pattern? . . . and you understand that if Mavrones. . ."

"Come along," she interrupted, and they walked towards the hotel together. "Did you notice that yacht?" she added, as they reached the veranda, "I think it was making for the harbour here."

Clearista was right: the yacht she had seen from the summer-house had already reached the wharf and was causing no little commotion among the Argan-

thian mariners. Putting to shore in Arganthus is always a problematic business, regulated more by Providence than harbour-gear, and complicated by two long reefs where surf is always breaking. In a big round boat manned by nine brown Greeks sat the lycanthropic Mavrones making his way to the yacht and waving his hand to the gigantic personage who seemed to be the master of it. The latter came over the side as soon as the boat was near, and shook Mavrones warmly by the hand.

"Well, here we are, Mav," he said: "everything all right, I suppose?"

"Perfectly right. How quick you have been. I was awfully glad to get your telegram."

"You see the yacht was at Venice already, so that saved time."

"What is the improvement in my plan which you mentioned?"

"Oh, I'll explain. I think in spite of the loss of the token we can go by Peking after all . . . are you taking me to the library?"

"Yes; but what is your plan?"

"This. Have you heard of my uncle General Badge?"

"Yes, but he's not your uncle, is he? Isn't his name spelt differently?"

"Yes; my father and he quarrelled about it. My father stuck to what he considered the antique spelling. The general thought this ridiculous pride, and spelt his name the ordinary way—which my father described as wilful vulgarity. Well, in his old age the General became reconciled to us, and has been especially kind to me. Now I knew he had some influence at the Chinese court. . . ."

"Didn't he command a Chinese army against the rebels or something?"

"Yes; in the Shan country. So I wrote to him and told him of our expedition. I said you wanted to run a thousand miles from Bhotan northwards, and pointed out that you would certainly be impaled or boiled alive or something of the sort. Then I asked him to give us letters to some Chinese officials, so as to try that way first. His answer was to be directed to me here, so perhaps it's now at the post office. He is sure to do what he can."

"Do you think the Chinese 'll let us through on his recommendation?"

"Well, I don't know. I should think his influence was as great as anybody's,"

"Let's go to the Post Office, anyhow."

They turned up a narrow winding street to the left; then mounted some steps, then went through a grocer's shop faced with marble that had once been white; this led into a yard where there was a large ladder, and at the top of the ladder a small room containing three postmen armed to the teeth. Such is the orthodox situation for the Post Office in Turkish towns; perhaps the Arganthians are unconsciously under Turkish influence in this matter. As none of the streets in Arganthus have names, nobody has any home address, and no letters are delivered. So Baj had a large pile of letters handed over to him, from which to take his choice.

He soon selected one, and glanced rapidly through it. "This is splendid," he remarked after a pause. "Look."

Mavrones read the following letter.

"MY DEAR QUENTIN,

"I do not see the necessity of endangering your lives in a search after a colony of Greeks, which

perhaps never existed, and which almost certainly has either been exterminated or merged in the surrounding races. My first advice is: Do not go. However, if you are bent upon your plan, I will give you all the assistance in my power. I enclose two letters, one to the Emperor, which should not be used except in case of necessity; and one to Man-sse-Kong, asking him to put your case before the Nai-ko. He is sure to oblige me, and his influence is at present very great. Please treat him with great respect, and do your very best to understand his English.

"I have only one request to make, one which may strike you as old-fashioned, but to which I hope you will agree. I have often felt considerable compunction to think of the numbers of Shans I sent to their Maker still heathens. I did not even, I am grieved to say, use what opportunities I had to convert my prisoners. They are a brave, simple-minded people, and, by the way, extremely treacherous; never go anywhere among them without either a revolver or a long knife, a knife is more trustworthy, on the whole—however, if you happen to go through that part of the country, I should be glad if you would leave a few Chinese bibles about. Do not trouble to preach to them yourselves. If you find the Greeks, they would make a good centre of evangelization.

"Wishing you all success,"

"I remain, . . .

"Your affectionate uncle,

"J. BADGE.

"P.S. In any case to run from Bhotan by night would be sheer madness."

"It is certainly grand," said Mavrones, as he finished the letter and they climbed down the ladder

again. "We must get some Chinese bibles at once . . . I can't help regretting our run through Thibet, though ; I have been practising for it every night."

"With success?" asked Baj with a smile.

"Well, last night I was nearly caught by the porter ; but otherwise with unqualified success."

"By Jove, though," said Baj suddenly: "I forgot one thing which ~~may~~ be rather a nuisance. You know Wibbling?"

"Wibbling of Oriel? I knew him slightly."

"Well, he ~~insists~~ on coming with us. It appears that he was going to take some Toynbee Hall people to Jerusalem with old Griggs. But it so happened that one day Griggs in a moment of thoughtlessness asked him to breakfast. When the morning came Griggs got up early and began to read, till suddenly he remembered with horror that Wibbling was coming to breakfast at half past eight. It was just eight when this struck him, and the more he thought it over, the more intolerable did the prospect seem. At last he took a desperate resolve. He ran round to Wibbling's lodgings, went into his sitting room, opened the bedroom door slightly, just enough to put his hand round and take out the key. Then he locked the door outside and threw the key into the fireplace, and went contentedly home again and told his scout he would breakfast alone. However, Wibbling somehow discovered this ; the two had a great row, Griggs went off to St. Petersburg with the Toynbee Hallers. . . ."

"You said Jerusalem just now."

"Ah, well it may have been Calcutta,—and so Wibbling was left at home with an outfit for a long journey and no prospect of going on one. By some evil chance he heard that I was going yachting, and wrote to ask if he might come ; not wishing to offend

the man, I left England without answering his letter, but I had a telegram at Venice saying he was coming after me. I expect he is there now, waiting to hear from us; what are we to do?"

"Oh, telegraph to him to come on here. He won't hurt us much, and he wants to come."

"Well, if you don't mind, I don't. But of all the bores in the world. . . ."

"Here we are at the Library. That is our Hotel through the other archway."

They went in under the old gateway with a certain feeling of awe, to think that they were now being ushered into the presence of the precious document. The custodian of the place, not so much a librarian as a lodge-keeper, followed them with speculative and contemptuous eyes. MSS. were not in his line; in his better days he had been a pirate, and he consequently looked down upon every other profession; but of all the professions he knew, that of a scholar like Mavrones seemed to him the most ludicrous and unpleasant. He liked and pitied Mavrones, but this tall stranger with the square chin merely aroused his disgust by visiting such things as libraries.

Mavrones took down the dingy MS. and brought it to the window. Baj put on a pair of spectacles and sat down to the examination.

"Here is my transcript," said Mavrones, handing him a sheet of foolscap.

"Thanks. Don't trouble to wait here. You might go and telegraph to Wibbling—Hotel S. Marco—and if you don't mind, see if they want anything down at the yacht. I don't suppose any of them can speak Greek."

"All-right. When you've finished, you'll find me in the Hotel garden."

So saying Mavrones set off again to the Post Office,

and despatched his invitation to the deserted Wibbling. Then he went down to the wharf, and acted as mediator in an angry discussion between the Scotch steward and the Arganthian custom house staff, which consisted of one old seaman in a tarnished uniform. The contention of the custom house was that as the yacht was not going to land any cargo, they might at least give him a few trachmas, and he would see that they paid no duty. The Scotchman's position was simply that he didn't understand it, and wasn't going to pay anything to an auld blasphemer. Mavrones managed to bring things to a peaceable conclusion by the temporary rout of the official extortioner, and then went back to the hotel and was wondering which of the garden chairs to sit upon, when he heard his name called from the summer-house. Clearista had given the pattern vase to Mozep and returned to her book. Mavrones ran down the lawn. It was one of the few signs left in him of un-English birth, this tendency to run without much provocation.

"I want you to promise, Mr. Mavrones, never to eat Mozep Kiarsk or myself."

"I don't like to bind myself, but what makes you anxious about it?"

"I am told that there is grave reason to suspect you of being a were-wolf. You have been seen undergoing transformations and running on four legs at night, with your jaws . . ."

"Good heavens! I have been seen, have I? That is a serious misfortune. I am not so clever as I thought."

"We intended to get a priest from Thessaly to exorcise you: I hope you have no objection?"

"None at all, but it will not be necessary. I am not going to practise running by night any more."

"Why did you begin doing so at all?"

"Well, I'll tell you the whole story. It is connected with the discovery I mentioned to you, in the Library."

"Are you sure you are right in telling me? If it is important that the secret should be kept. . . ."

"You are hard upon me," he said lightly, "you know I never really distrusted you in the least."

"You must have—or why didn't you tell me when I asked you?"

"I only felt ashamed to speak of the wild hopes I had, to any one who could not enter into them. . . . or rather, appreciate the evidence on which they were founded."

Clearista did not answer. He went on:

"Now you see, I feel more confidence, now that Baj believes in it all as much as I do. However I must tell you the whole story."

He then went briefly through what we already know, the discovery of Hegesias' letter, the conclusion, he had drawn therefrom, and the plan of setting out for the Greek settlement. She listened with a certain impatience; so much enthusiasm for a thing in which she could have no share was slightly disagreeable to her. Yet, it was some consolation to think she was trusted at last. She interrupted him once:

"How many people have you told of this?"

"Baj, my father, and you. No one else," he answered, and went on with his story.

"How do you mean to get to the settlement?" she asked.

"Well, our first idea was to travel from the nearest point of British India northwards, till we got information. The letter gives directions. . . ."

"But is it safe travelling in these parts?"

"I am afraid it isn't. We should first have to go through Thibet, where Englishmen are expressly forbidden to enter. And after that it would be still worse; we should have to go through Tartary, and I suppose a Tartar would always kill you for your pocket handkerchief."

Her eyes opened rather more widely than usual with a strained expression as she replied,

"How do you intend to travel through these Tartars?"

"Well our idea was to run secretly during the night and hide in the daytime. But, as I said. . . ."

"Good heavens! How far is it? It would be madness to try such a thing."

"Yes, I think it would. We've got another plan, now; but it is the run through Tartary that I was practising, when your friend took me for a were-wolf."

"Thank goodness you've given up that idea. What is your new plan?"

"My friend Baj has a relative with great influence at the Chinese court; we shall try to get permission to travel that way."

The whole story began to strike Clearista as a dream; she could not take it in or believe in its reality. Yet it was for some reason an unpleasant dream, and every incident in it assumed a painful shape in her eyes. Something ill-omened seemed to hang about the entire project.

"That'll be a capital plan—won't it?" he asked, as she did not speak.

"It seems to me almost worse than the other. How many people one hears of, who have been allowed into the interior of China and never come back. And think of the missionaries they have tortured to death."

"But if we go, we shall go under special protection from the Emperor—or at least from one of the councils."

"The missionaries all had their safety vouched for. That means nothing."

"But you don't suppose the Chinese will put us to death? I really——"

"Yes. And send a letter to the English Consul regretting that you have died of fever. I think it wrong, desperately wrong of you to endanger your life like this."

"I don't think the danger is nearly as great as you suppose. And besides, surely you agree with me that any true Greek would risk his life gladly in such a cause."

"Perhaps, I am not a true Greek after all," she said, sadly. "But I wish you would not go!"

He did not answer; not the angel Gabriel in person could have turned him back from his journey. She went on:

"Do you not think of the pain you would cause to other people if you died there?"

"I've written to my father about it. I am sure he will think it my duty to go—though of course my death would matter more to him than to me."

"Is there no one else?"

"No one who would feel it half so much."

"Are you sure of that?" she asked, half desperately; "none of your College friends, for instance?"

"Really, you know, the danger isn't anything like so serious as you imagine. And even if it were . . . however, will you promise me one thing before we go? If Baj and I don't return, will you select some one to explain the whole matter to, and send him

after us? In time, success would be certain, and your patriotism . . ."

"I told you I have no patriotism. I would rather die than send anyone to that desert to be murdered by Tartars!"

Mavrones could not understand the sudden bitterness in her voice.

"Would you like to see the MS.?" he asked, to change the subject.

"I care nothing for the MS. I wish it had been burned with the madman who wrote it. : ."

Mavrones was puzzled and a little hurt. "I am sorry you do not approve of my plan. I quite expected you to sympathise with me about it. I think I must go to the library and look for Baj, he was to have been here before now."

She sat quite still, staring before her, as he got up and walked across the lawn. It seemed as if some despair had penetrated her whole being till there was nothing left of her but a consciousness of pain. Yet externally there was little difference in her face or posture since the morning, when she was rallying Mozep on his fears. Only a certain rigidity in her attitude, and a strained blind look in her widely-opened eyes. For the rest she sat as she sat before, in the same corner of the summer-house, where the light sea-breezes came tossing still, mingling the faint gusts of magnolia-fragrance with the salt of the little plashing waves below, too lazy to break into foam.

It was lucky such fine weather should have come on this particular day; for this was the feast of a local saint, whom nobody but Kiarsk had ever heard of before, and there were great rejoicings in the market-street of Arganthus—a "*fantasia*" in fact, with swings and conjurers, and trays of sweetmeats, and little dolls

to shoot at for prizes. So it was less surprising than it would otherwise have been, to see our three friends, Lord Strathbourne, Baj, and Mozep Kiarsk, come into the garden together carrying six guinea-pigs. Mozep carried three with grace and familiarity as if he had been specially educated with a view to guinea-pig-carrying. Baj managed two without discredit; while Lord Strathbourne held the remaining pig, as he would have held a baby or a boa-constrictor, at arms'-length, tightly grasped. Mozep, while buying the new vase, had noticed the excitement in the market, and gone immediately to fetch Lord Strathbourne, with whom he had struck up a fast friendship. Shy and taciturn men are often pleased to have an easy and garrulous companion. The two as they left the Hotel grounds had met Baj, who was looking for Mavrone. Mozep instantly made his acquaintance and carried him off to the scene of festivity, where they had all ridden in swings, and had their handkerchiefs turned into birds, and shot at little dolls with toy guns—the others indifferently, Mozep with such prodigious success, as to bring home in triumph this litter of guinea-pigs. *

Clearista, a strange hard Clearista, appeared at the door of the summer-house. The party had just reached the veranda. She beckoned rather imperiously with her hand.

"Lord Strathbourne, I wish* to speak to you," she cried.

Lord Strathbourne looked round with a smile, and started to go down the lawn, when he remembered his guinea-pig. After a moment's hesitation, he deposited the guinea-pig in his tall hat, and the hat on a seat in the veranda, and walked down to the summer-house.

The little guinea-pig was relieved to be out of that firm hold, which had made its journey from the market place so distressing. It had been quite unable to move, and both its hind legs had gone to sleep. How much pleasanter to be left in this nice open box, where it could move about as it liked and kick itself free from pins and needles. One thing at a time: as soon as its legs were comfortable, the question arose whether the sides of the box were good to eat. It tried them. Yes, not so bad: you couldn't call them appetizing, exactly, and they were difficult to bite; but still they were quite edible What a curious place to live in: it supposed the great thing in which it had travelled from the shooting booth, lived in this box. Yet, if so, he didn't seem to eat much, for the sides were not a bit nibbled and there was nothing else to eat. Perhaps he didn't eat at all: and yet he walked about, so he must be a guinea-pig, because all guinea-pigs walk about. He might be a guinea-pig; but he was not the proper sort of guinea-pig, that was clear. How very few things were the proper kind of guinea-pig! Some were so small you trod on them without noticing, and even swallowed them in your food: and some were so big you couldn't see the whole of them at once. Now a real guinea-pig is just the proper size; and the proper shape, too, for that matter The box has got no lid to it; if one could get out perhaps there are lettuces outside. It puts two little paws and a soft head over the rim of the hat: delightful! ever such a lot of grass all about; if only there is nobody looking! With a palpitating heart it looked round the garden.

Whether guinea-pigs have an eye for scenery is a point on which it would be criminal to pronounce a hasty judgment. If they have, then perhaps this

guinea-pig, as he cast his eye about him, saw the summer-house and the magnolias and the sea: saw the tall red-whiskered man at the door of the summer-house as he clasped to his breast and kissed a woman whose face was turned away, and then walked joyously down to the water's edge: saw the woman's beautiful pale face and wide despairing eyes lifted in a sudden spasm of distress; saw her sink miserably upon a seat and cover her face with her hands.

But perhaps such scenes did not interest our guinea-pig. He looked cautiously round, and assured himself that his actions were unobserved. Then he leant forward against the brim of the hat preparing for a leap, when suddenly—terror of terrors!—the hat toppled forwards and fell off the chair on to the floor. Somewhat dazed by this catastrophe, the guinea-pig gathered his wits together, and walking off to the seclusion of the nearest flower-bed, enjoyed himself to his heart's content.

CHAPTER IV.

IF you have ever gone yachting to Peking, you remember how long and tiresome a task it is to get all your travelling necessities finally together, even though unburdened with long knives and Chinese Testaments. In Mavrones' case the knives and Testaments were not the worst: he had thought with a quaint unselfishness that if he hoped to gain from the mysterious settlement so much priceless salvage of old Greece, he ought in mere honesty to make them some return. He was from the very first slightly distressed to think that the exiles had gone away too soon to have known anything of Plato; the hypothetical intercourse with Greece could not have lasted long enough; so he determined to requite them with large quantities of the later literature written after their captivity. He ordered Teubner and Tauchnitz texts with prodigality:—all the Greek classics of note, and most of the Latin, began to pour in a steady stream to the Hotel St. Nicholas at Arganthus: and Teubner and Tauchnitz, if there be any human clay behind those great names, must almost have been surprised at the largeness of the order. Mavrones added English classics too, and was even hankering in secret after French and Italian and German. Only the saturnine chaff of Baj and the loud jeers of Wibbling had stemmed the flow of his enthusiasm.

Wibbling had arrived in all haste from Venice, arrived red-nosed suspicious and hungry, ready to

grumble freely at Mavrones and unable to toady Baj without an effort. For Wibbling was the most ordinary of mortals, and rather below than above the moral average. He was in a way a popular man, not that he had any lovable qualities: but his faults were so numerous, so irrepressible and so easily seen through by the dullest observer, that one felt perfectly at ease and slightly self-satisfied in his society. He had quarrelled to the death with every custom house official between London and the Piræus; he claimed to have been cheated and poisoned, insulted and misunderstood, by every guard and every steward; and he strongly suspected that his friends were trying to start without him. Naturally enough his suspicions fell upon Mavrones; first because he was the wrong man, secondly because it would have been suicidal policy to quarrel with the owner of the yacht. So Mavrones surrounded himself with a wall of amiability, and prayed that his fellow-voyager's heart or digestion would in time adapt itself to the necessities of social intercourse.

Kiarsk regarded Wibbling with unconcealed dislike. He was not foredoomed to travel with him, so he could indulge his wrath with impunity. The wrath had arisen in this wise. After the discovery of Mavrones' vampire-like proclivities, Mozep felt a constant uneasiness which his sister's raillery had not power to shake. It was indeed a mercy that the werewolf was no longer to share the same house with himself and his relatives; but to think of the unhappy Baj! To travel half-way round the world with a companion who was liable at any moment to eat you in your sleep—it must not be permitted, said Mozep. Kiarsk had a great respect for Baj, a respect chiefly due no doubt to his size and taciturnity; Baj, too, who

was bored by most people, had a fondness for out-of-the-way acquaintances, especially if they were ridiculous. An opportune moment soon occurred, and Mozep told Baj the whole story; pointed out the irresistible conclusion, and conjured him by the Panagia not to travel in Mavrones' company.

This was just what Baj enjoyed. He drew Mozep out to his heart's content, and learnt all kinds of miracle stories which Kiarsk mostly kept for highly initiated ears. He would not actually state his belief in Mavrones' were-wolfdom, but when Kiarsk, as a last resort, sent to an acquaintance of his, a Thessalian priest, for a charm against devouring devils, and finally appeared before Baj with a queer little ornament, a cross of hair and bones, with tiny horns projecting from both arms; Baj accepted the amulet with gravity and put it round his neck.

When Wibbling arrived Mozep attempted to save a friend's life. He took Wibbling to the summer-house and told him the whole story as he had told it to Baj. Or rather, not quite as he had told it to Baj: for the story had grown stronger and more awful meanwhile. The blood now was running without doubt from Mavrones' jaws: he had not only seen it, he had heard it dripping on the iron roof of the veranda; and other terrors bristled about the tale. The consequence was that Wibbling, who had at first been refreshed with the prospect of hearing a story against Mavrones, ended by thinking Kiarsk quite the most audacious of all the impostors he had met on his way from London. His immediate suspicion was that Kiarsk wanted to sell him something, or at any rate to borrow money on the strength of the warning he had given. But as there seemed no evidence to support this view, he half concluded that Kiarsk had

been suborned by Mavrones to prevent his sailing in the yacht. At any rate he thought it the safest course to give way to his instincts: he told Mozep that he was not going to be swindled: that he knew better: that he had never heard such rot; and that he needn't try any of his barbarous superstitions on an English university man!

For Wibbling actually boasted of this distinction. Beyond belonging to the University he had nothing else in his relations to it, to boast of. Mediocre in the schools, his intellect was a blank outside them: he played football badly, cricket not at all. He rowed ~~out~~ of time, and said he was the only man in time. He passed through the University as a perfectly ordinary young Englishman of the higher class, without the infamy which attaches to a "smug" or a "bounder," without even the mild notoriety of a tee-totaller, a socialist, or a volunteer.

Some days after this memorable conversation, Wibbling, as he sat in the summer-house, saw Mavrones coming towards the hotel with a little casket in his hand. Wibbling was not a retiring man.

"What's that?" he shouted from the bottom of the garden.

"It is a bracelet I am giving to that Greek lady you have seen. It is a wedding present: she is going to be married to Lord Strathbourne."

"The devil she is! Well that's what I said all along. I told Baj only the other day that she was laying traps for some one, and if he didn't look out . . ."

"You are entirely mistaken. She is incapable of laying traps for anybody," answered Mavrones with unwonted scorn. "It is Lord Strathbourne who has to be congratulated."

- “Don’t talk to me,” said Wibbling sagely, as Mavrones walked away, following the advice before it was given.

Before he got indoors he was stopped by Baj, who appeared at the gate, and shouted after him. “I say, Mavrones,” he cried, “come to the library. There’s something we haven’t seen.”

Braclet and all, Mavrones ran across the lawn and followed Baj to the library.

“Look at that *theta*,” said Baj pointing to a particular letter in the MS. which lay in its usual place near the window.

“What is there remarkable about it?” enquired the other; “the dot inside is rather darker than usual; but I don’t see. . . .”

“It’s dark and it’s round;” said Baj: • “all the other *thetas* have bars in them, not dots. The ink is fainter at the edges—it’s a recent blot.”

“A blot! Good heavens, so it is. How shameful of me not to notice it Some one has been here before us then.”

“Perhaps it’s only Wibbling: he’s been poking about here and it’s just the sort of thing he’d do: only he’d never confess it.”

- “It can’t be that. It is faint, and there are no marks of rubbing out. The ink must be several years old.”

There was a short pause: both were speculating about the unknown perpetrator of the blot.

“He may not have gone to Thibet after all:” suggested Baj.

“I think he must. Otherwise, if he had read the letter he would have published it, and the affair would have become generally known.”

“Perhaps he never even read it. • It’s awfully hard;

and he may merely have been moving the book, or perhaps reading the inside. Would the Librarian know anything about it?"

"Nothing. He professes to understand nothing but piracy, and I doubt if he is at all profound in that."

"There's no list of readers?"

"No: there's no system of any kind. The library takes care of itself."

There was another thoughtful pause: then Baj resumed:

"Whoever the man was, it can't alter our plans, can it?"

"Oh, no. If he went there, he is probably dead; otherwise we should have heard about him. He would have returned or sent a message."

"I wonder how he went. Perhaps China was open then."

"It is quite possible. We have no way of determining his date." Mavrones was instinctively treating the blot as he would a new fragment of an unknown author.

"In any case, without some such introduction as we have, I hardly think he could have got far into the interior."

"I expect he must be dead, whichever way he went. I dare say he'd be glad to think we were coming after him. . . Let's go and tell Wibbling."

"No, don't, he'd only make a fool of himself," said the haughty Baj; "it's as much as he can do to keep from telling everyone already."

"You know I have told Clearista?" said Mavrones.

"Yes, I don't think it was prudent; but of course you know best, and it's your discovery. . . Is that a present for her?" he added, noticing the casket.

• “Yes,” answered Mavrones; “I must go and give it to her.”

• Clearista was sitting in the drawing-room alone. She had taken to sitting indoors the last few days, and quite deserted her old haunts, the summer-house and the garden. Her reasons were doubtless mixed. For one thing, “the owl and the jackal hooted in her pleasant places,” or, at least Wibbling did; which from some points of view amounted to the same thing. And besides, it may be that since that reckless promise in the garden, she felt a sense of change, of estrangement, which made the joyousness of flowers and sunshine and blue water jar upon her like dance music on a sick man. A spiritless listless bride, this, wearily gentle, yet desiring no relief, to whom the bold Lord Strathbourne brings assiduous flowers and trinkets. Poor fellow, he was somewhat dismayed at first by Clearista’s depression: but a little self-applied casuistry, and a walk with his mentor, Mozep Kiarsk, persuaded him that it was all quite natural—nothing but a little nervousness and timidity, partly due to the hot weather, and sure to disappear after marriage.

• “Damme, you know,” he said to Kiarsk, “I admire her the more for it—delicately balanced you know; sensitive organization:” a sentiment with which Kiarsk judiciously agreed. Mozep, always loyal to his sister except under very severe trials, was delighted at the prospect of the marriage: and old Botzares too was happy enough, to think that his queer old conscience and his grandson’s feelings had not been disregarded in vain, and that Clearista had been right as she always was.

• She was sitting in the drawing room alone when Mavrones came, with the bracelet. The drawing-

room, like most other things in Arganthus, was a liberal compromise between Eastern and Western manners: that is to say, it possessed all of both. A *makkad* or low seat running all round the walls, and a matted floor with no chairs or tables, constituted a satisfactory drawing-room for a Syrian. And he couldn't much complain if the empty floor had afterwards been filled with gaudy Viennese tables and uncomfortable things with legs on which Europeans pretended to enjoy seating themselves, and if the *makkad* was interrupted by a marble fireplace with a patent American stove. Clearista was sitting on the *makkad* close to the empty grate.

"I have brought you a wedding-present," said Mavrones opening the casket.

"It is beautiful," she said without much fervour; "I shall always value it. . . . When do you start?"

"Perhaps to-morrow morning. We are only waiting for a little Etna and some mackintoshes, which ought to arrive this afternoon."

"Then perhaps I shall not see you again?"

"O, we shall not start very early. By the way, Baj has made a fresh discovery. There was a blot on the MS., about ten years old, which seems to show that some one has found it out before, and, I suppose, gone on the same quest as ourselves."

"Then, why do you go?" she said quickly. "If there is anything there, he is sure to write about it, and as for the glory. . ."

"Ah, but you see that is ten years ago—at least it can't be much less. . . and if he had been successful he would have sent word to Europe long ago. Besides——"

"Do you mean you think he is dead?" she asked in the same quick voice interrupting him.

• “Well, yes, I do. You see he has not been heard of for ten years; and then he hadn’t our means of getting through China; and the other way. . . .”

“You say he must be dead, and his journey utterly wasted, and you are wilfully going to follow him? I think it is wicked.”

“I am sorry you are so much against us,” he said with a smile: “I will bring you back some choice Sogdianian bijouterie to make you reconciled after the fact. It will be unique.”

She did not acknowledge the pleasantry. “Suppose the Chinese do let you through, and then you go on and don’t find any settlement of Greeks . . . how will you come back?”

“If possible, I suppose, get back to China. But at the worst we can return to our old plan and get away South through Thibet to India. So perhaps my lessons in night-running won’t have been wasted after all.”

“What part of India should you come to—Nepaul?”

“Roughly, about there, I suppose. Most likely we should come by a caravan route through Bhotan, or possibly through Sikkim to Darjeeling. But that is only in case it comes to the worst.”

“I feel certain it will come to the worst. Good-bye; we shall probably not meet again.”

“Good-bye: but won’t you see us to-morrow morning?”

“No; I hate the idea of your journey and I will have no part in it. Good-bye.”

She was standing up now, leaning her head against the mantelpiece. He did not see her face, but the hand she held out to him was very cold.

The Etna and the mackintoshes came in due time,

and by ten o'clock on the following morning the yacht was ready to start. Everybody in Arganthus was on the pier to wish the travellers a pleasant voyage, for handsome yachts do not start every day from Arganthus to Peking. Lord Strathbourne of course was there, kindly and stiff: the Arch-demiurge of the Arganthians, who had been taking a morning stroll with his cook, lent an aroma of civic majesty to the scene: even the ex-pirate Anastasios deigned to cast a critical eye upon the cut of the yacht and speculate what much better use he would have made of it forty years ago. But whose presence was so indispensable, or whose advice so profound, as Mozep's? He almost wept at parting from Baj; but was just saved from tears by the pleasure of expounding at this critical moment the one infallible remedy for a Simoon or a Typhoon: he heartily forgave Wibbling for his brutality, and even softened at the moment of parting towards the redoubtable Mavrones; though, to be sure, as he frequently kissed his right hand towards the slight figure on the retreating deck, his left was sticking rigidly out from his side, the fingers forming a pair of horns to avert diabolic influences.

There was a light summer haze in the air, making the horizon dim, and giving promise of a cloudless noonday. A fresh breeze blowing from the Strymon's mouth, and, let us hope, of better burden than the Strymonian blasts of old, sent the yacht swiftly down the Aegean towards that cluster of dark islets which dimly broke the haze to the South. On board there were high hopes and spirits and the exhilarating sense of a great work happily begun. Even Wibbling was at peace with his fellow men: Baj smoked in stern enjoyment upon the bridge, and Mavrones, though

Clearista's parting words had thrown a certain gloom over him for the time, was now pacing the deck in delightful forecast of the wonders to be unveiled in the land of the Sanni. So the yacht was running quickly towards the haze, and would soon appear in the eyes of those who watched it from the garden of St. Nicholas, only a smaller greyer blot, luminous among the shadowy islands.

Lord Strathbourne put down his field glasses. "I can see nothing more," he said: "she has almost disappeared."

"I can see Mavrones walking at the stern," said Mozep: "isn't it he, Clearista? I think it is."

"Yes," said Clearista, and waved her handkerchief in the wind. She waved it for a long time but no answering signal came from the yacht. He who should have answered could not see where she saw, and the distance that her eyes traversed without effort was a gulf he never even thought of crossing. She accepted her failure, and put the handkerchief back in her pocket.

"What extraordinary eye you two must have!" said Lord Strathbourne; "I can't make out anything even with these glasses."

"I can see nothing now," said Clearista. . . "By the way," she added, "about our honeymoon, I have rather changed my mind. Do you think we might go to India?"

"A splendid idea!" said his Lordship, "if you don't mind the sea. What part shall we go to? It would be too hot in the South?"

"O yes: the North would be best. We might go first to Calcutta, and then, say, up to Darjeeling and Bhotan."

CHAPTER V.

WHATEVER sensations Wibbling might be expected to experience at the thought of being imprisoned in the same yacht with one friend and a were-wolf, in the result they were nothing to what the were-wolf and the friend felt at being confined alone with Wibbling. Baj, being a person of strong views and decided action, refused to tolerate any trifling from the first. If you are a man of six feet two, with dark moustaches and a crushing manner, and if further you are the possessor of an *acer et contemptor animus*, with few good-natured weaknesses to spoil the edge of a resolve, you may with a little trouble dominate the worst bores of your acquaintance. Baj, from the moment when Wibbling had arrived at Arganthus and displayed in his every gesture a determination to travel in that yacht or die, had been fain to treat him with bare civility on occasion and converse with him as seldom as he could. On the second morning of the voyage, when the news came to him that Mr. Wibbling felt unwell and would not get up to breakfast, he had murmured a laconic "Thank God," and taken no further notice.

Mavrones was not in possession of the same gifts. On hearing of the illness of his friend—for is not that old definition right which makes Friendship "any degree of acquaintance short of enmity?"—Mavrones had at once taken toast and coffee to Wibbling's cabin, and waited while his own breakfast got cold

to be reproached for not bringing biscuits and tea. He had waited on him during the morning, sought him out refreshing novels and a digestible lunch, and finally prepared rugs and a cane reclining chair upon the deck. There was a certain gentleness about Mavrones, something that struck you as almost feminine in an Englishman, but which perhaps in reality was only Greek: and besides, his absorption in the happy excitement of his enterprise was producing a kind of restless amiability, which found a pleasant vent in tending a decidedly irritable sufferer. Baj slightly disapproved of Mavrones' behaviour. "You ought to thank your stars he's ill for a day, or two;" he said; "won't you look back to this time when he recovers."

He did recover in course of time: and after proving at some length and to his complete satisfaction that his illness was not due to the sea, but to those vile Arganthian cigars, proceeded to make himself happy and truculent. He was by no means a particularly bad man, and Mavrones' kindness had for the time being conciliated him. The insolent enmity of the last week had disappeared, and he even sought the society of Mavrones in preference to that of Baj.

"Can't make it out," said the latter; "but at the worst I've made arrangements for putting him in irons."

It never actually came to that. Three ordinary people shut up together on a yacht for two months are pretty certain to quarrel, but no quarrel could last for long where Mavrones was at hand as peacemaker.

So the voyage dragged on, half the day spent in learning Mongol, and more than a quarter in desultory fancies about the Greek settlement, and plans to meet the various emergencies that might arise on the way;

what to do, if the Chinese Ambassador refused to see them ; what, if they were made to pay an enormous sum for the right of travel ; what, if they were met by robbers, or accused of being civil engineers, or conjurers, or clergymen. After the first week Mongol was the only language permitted at meals, a rule which had the bye-advantage of reducing Wibbling to silence. On they went through the Canal from Port Said to Suez, then on under burning skies from Suez to Aden, the bulwarks so hot with the straight rays that you could not keep your hand on them for more than half a minute : then away over the Indian Ocean, with the same burning skies but winds livelier and stronger, through deeply phosphorescent seas to Colombo and Singapore ; and finally turned their backs to ' that fierce sun and ran quickly northwards through many mazes of islands and jagged coasts, till . . till . . How can I finish the sentence while the yellow Imperial Seal is staring me in the face, and these words over it ?

"It is definitely to be understood, that permission has been granted to the said Englishmen, Ma-pro-ne, Pa-tche, and Wee-pee-ling, to travel in the territory of the Great. . . This, That and The Other, the Son of the°Sky" (i.e. the Emperor of China) "on one condition only. That the said Englishmen shall neither draw maps, write books, ask questions, visit places of interest, nor in any way seek either to gain or impart knowledge concerning any person, place, circumstance, institution or thing, in any part of the Great. . . This, That, and The Other's dominions; that futhermore, the said Englishmen, Ma-pro-ne, Pa-tche, and Wee-pee-ling, shall promise and swear by whatever oaths are considered valid in their

excellent religion, that they will hereafter, when they have returned to their highly creditable fatherland, observe rigidly this condition stated above, and neither mention nor allow to be mentioned any person, place, circumstance, institution or thing, with which they have become acquainted in the Celestial Empire.

Man-sse-Kong

Quentin Baj

Thomas Marmaduke Wibbling

Mavrones."

It looks much more important in Chinese, and the translation is, I suspect, very inadequate. However that may be, it is clear that we must for the time being leave Mavrones in the Yellow Sea, confident from the above document that he somehow did get his permission to travel, and hoping some time or other to meet him again when he reaches the other side of the Great Wall.

And what of the sad beautiful face that watched the yacht disappear from the old oleander garden of Arganthus? We must not forget Clearista, while we follow the three men across the Indian ocean, not even when we follow them hereafter into the wastes of the Asiatic desert, should they indeed ever set foot upon its sands. Least of all should we forget her now, when she is miserable and dispirited, and sits for hours and hours wondering helplessly how she shall ever go through with the life she has taken up in a gust of momentary bravado and despair.

She was thrown entirely on her own resources. Her grandfather as a confidant was simply a ludicrous idea, and even Moezep was not what a sister or mother

would have been. Besides, Mozep was such a goose ; he would only tell her long stories about his own exploits in remote places, and expatiate on the inconsistency of her now wanting to get rid of the commodity she had worked so long, at his expense, to procure. He was, in fact, an incarnate "I told you so." However, Mozep was sympathetic and obedient, and she felt such a longing to talk over her grief with some one, that even a brother did not seem worse than nothing.

She watched for him one day in the garden, and stopped him as he was going through the arch. Mozep happened to be in his frivolous humour, and ~~was~~ shouting with extreme expression the last air he had heard at a *fantasia* ; on being addressed he ran across the lawn, knelt on one knee at his sister's feet and kissed her hand, murmuring burlesque compliments in the style of an American clown. This would, perhaps, have discouraged an ordinary young lady from making any serious confidences, but Clearista knew her brother's moods.

"When you have finished this pantomime, sit down on a chair and be serious. I have something very important to consult you about."

"Hagie Benjamin ! Think not, my sister, that the lightheartedness of a moment will prolong itself beyond the. . ."

"Exactly. Now sit down and listen to me."

He took a place on the seat beside her, and with an effort worked himself into the proper state of mind for receiving serious and confidential news. This he achieved by imagining to himself that he was the patriarch Gregory hearing of the massacre of the Bishops by Sultan Mahmoud. He was the picture of righteous solemnity when she began.

"Mozep, I think perhaps you were right, and I was wrong about all this."

"That is very likely, my sister. But about what?"

"About my marrying an Englishman. I almost wish I wasn't engaged to Lord Strathbourne—he is very good and kind, you know, and of course very rich. . . ."

Mozep hesitated a moment. By this time he was thoroughly reconciled to the match; he liked the man and was proud of the title. Besides, as Sophia had suggested ideas to Clearista, so Clearista had to Mozep. What was to prevent his marrying, say, a Russian princess? What princess would not be overjoyed?

"This is a serious matter, my sister. If you broke the engagement off, he would probably say that he had broken it off, as my friend Selim did with poor Antronika. You know it was really her father who rejected Selim, for cheating at cards; but Selim, of course, not wishing that report to be spread, always said it was he who had rejected Antronika, though as an honourable man he would make no accusations against her. . . . He meant no harm you know, but it damaged Antronika's prospects; and after all, what. . . ."

"O, stop, Mozep! That sort of thing is out of the question. It is never done. At any rate, I am quite certain Lord Strathbourne would never do it. It is almost insulting of you. . . . though I know you mean it kindly," she added, seeing that she had hurt his feelings.

"Of course, Selim had his business to consider. If the true story had got about, it would have caused him the loss, Holy Nicholas, of thousands."

"Hush. The only question is whether I can take

back my word now without doing Lord Strathbourne a serious wrong. You see. . ."

"That, my sister, you certainly can not. . ."

This was the first stage of the argument, and she stopped to think it over."

"No, I suppose I can't," she said with a sigh. "I have no excuse at all."

Mozep took the cigarette from his lips. "You of course understand, Clearista, that though in the privacy of fraternal intercourse I condemn your proposal, nevertheless, if you determine to carry it out, I shall of course support you through all vicissitudes, and in fact make whatever statements you may consider suitable." It was not often that Clearista let him get all through a period uninterrupted, and he felt a certain gratitude to her as well as triumph for this success.

"You *do* think it would be very wrong of me?"

"Yes, my sister, I do."

"Wouldn't it be worse to marry him without really caring for him much. . . . because that might cause him greater pain in the end?"

Mozep paused again and interrupted the cigarette.

"Frankness, my sister, is occasionally necessary, even though otherwise undesirable. Pardon me—you love Mr. Mavrones?"

She blushed crimson and her eyes swam. "No, no, no!" she said, "how dare you accuse me of such a thing? Besides, he is away in China or India, and he will very likely be killed there, and at any rate I shall never see him again. Oh, no, Mozep; don't think of such a thing."

A silence of some moments ensued. Mozep was drawing conclusions, and thinking what kind of advice would do his sister most good while at the same

time redounding to his own glory. Clearista was regretting she had ever spoken to Mozep at all. He was so different from her in all his thoughts and views of things. He was all the Levantine or the Tartar; and she—she didn't know what she was, part Greek, part English, part. . . But Mozep had begun a further piece of advice.

“I should upon the whole, my dear sister, recommend you under any circumstances to marry the Lordos. What you say about Mavrones' absence and dangers appears to me very just. After all, the Lordos is a good man, and you will have with him a life of leisure, comfort and distinction;” (here came a self-satisfied whiff at the cigarette); “you will be able perhaps to exercise some influence in Greek politics. I may, perhaps, relate to you a story somewhat like your own. When I was last in Algiers, I saw in the square opposite the landing, a young lady walking with her husband, a person of great beauty and wealth, though you will understand I do not wish to mention her name. I said to our agent: ‘My dear friend,’ I said, ‘what can you tell me of the lady we see before us?’ And he replied: ‘This only, my dear friend, can I tell you. They are the happiest couple in the whole of the colony!’ Now, my sister, I mention this because, two years before, when I was in Algiers last, this lady had, I regret to say it, been occupied with an extreme affection for myself—nay, by St. Zadah, do not go, my sister. . . I assure you I did not inflame her passion. I did all I could to discourage it. I, Mozep Kiarsk, who stand before you, I actually——”

But Clearista was gone—gone with more bitter indignation against Mozep than perhaps she had ever felt in her life before. We need not pry into her angry

thoughts ; she was suffering greatly all those long, summer days, and she could find no one to help her even for an hour. Mozep was a failure, a miserable, a ludicrous failure ; though, perhaps, she thought, his advice was 'the wisest after all. Yet she made one attempt to get free, not a very spirited one, though it cost a long preparation and a desperate effort.

She was in a boat with Lord Strathbourne ; he used often to row her round the bays and inlets of the island when the sea was calm enough. The business of rowing and steering made conversation unnecessary, and gave a cover to the periodic silences that were even longer and more awkward between these two than is usual in young fiancés. This afternoon Clearista had been specially intractable ; and her lover's efforts to talk had sunk into despair, when she brusquely began :

"The English are very strict about truth telling, aren't they ?"

"Yes, I think they are, more than some nations, though of course, I don't mean——"

"You could never be friends with a person who had told you a lie."

"Well, it depends on the lie. If it were only one, and not a very bad one——"

"If it were one huge lie, running all through the person's life ?"

"What do you mean ?" said his lordship, prudently, fearing to commit himself.

"Suppose after all my talk about patriotism, and passing as a Greek of the old times, and writing pamphlets and so on—suppose you found I was not a Greek after all, and not a patriot, and—and only an impostor from beginning to end !"

"My dearest—please keep her head against the

• waves—but you are a Greek, and a patriot, and the most beautiful of all——”

• “I am not. I am a Tartar from the Kalmuck marshes, and. I have denied my country, and pretended to be a Greek, and posed as a patriot, and written those pamphlets, and all to—to—oh, I daren't tell you what I did it for!”

• She was sobbing violently and hiding her face in her lap.

Lord Strathbourne paused before answering. He felt it would be heartless to ask her to mind the steering, yet he saw that unless something was done the boat would probably be caught broadside on, and upset. He rowed as hard as ever he could to a little creek where the waves were broken by a reef. In six strokes he was in calm water.

He dropped the oars and caught Clearista in his arms.

“My dearest,” he said, “don't you thee it doethn't matter a bit where you were born? If you are by birth a Kalmuck you're a Greek in everything else, and you *are* a patriot, whether you say it or not. You never posed or did anything of the kind, and you ought to be proud of the pamphlets—not ashamed—I am sure I should be if I'd written them.” And so he went on and on, very affectionate and kind, and always argumentative withal, until he probably considered he had torn her adverse statement into shreds. But the worst was yet to come.

There was a fact which, if she had told it, would have reduced him to silence and misery and broken their troth for ever. But she had not even realized the truth of it to herself yet, much less would she have confessed it to another. She was touched and softened by his manner; he was so kind and strong, and

must love her so deeply if he could make so light of all her hypocrisy. But she determined to try hard to tell him at least one bitter truth more. She was unnerved and weak, but she must try.

He had exhausted his coherent arguments, and was only leaning over her with words of comfort. "Don't be so unhappy," he was saying, "and don't think badly of yourself. I love you more than anything in the world, and I wouldn't love you unless you were——"

She raised her head suddenly and met his eyes full. He looked so happy and strong and truthful, she felt her task somehow made easier. A man like that could easily forego the love of such a woman as she was; he would take it lightly, she hoped in a strange infatuation, as he had taken the confession of her birth. She just mustered up heart slowly to pronounce the words:

"I don't love you, and when I said I did . . ."

But how could she face the sudden sorrow and horror-stricken reproach of those loyal eyes? He had started back from her words, and was now kneeling on the bottom of the boat and looking at her fixedly, his cheeks all grey and his forehead contracted, a picture of intense undisguised suffering, like an animal suddenly beaten by the hand from which it expected kindness. She could not bear the sense of her cruelty and blindly retracted her half-unsaid words.

"No, no, no, I don't mean that. I do love you; at least—O, yes, I do—O, Panagia, what will become of me?" So he was at her side again in a moment and the one effort to escape had failed for ever.

She liked him better after that, and felt less constrained and dull in his society. Mavrones was

pretty constantly in her mind all these first few weeks, but it was never in relation to herself that he appeared, or, at least, never when she could help it. It was his dangers she thought about ; the half hope that the Chinese government might refuse him passage, that the previous discoverer of the M.S. might meet him in Peking and bring him home to Greece, or some happy chance might, after all, carry him safely through. And at the end of it all came back the old foreboding that he would be left helpless, perhaps starving, somewhere in the great desert, with all the human beings who saw him ready, perhaps, to murder him, but never to give him help : and have to try the desperate route southwards over the mountains of Thibet and Bhotan.

So there were hearts that were moved for Mavrones in Greece while he was yet on the threshold of his journey and his dangers. And there were hearts in England, too, or one heart at least,—that of the old man who sat upon the sands at Porthcarno in Cornwall day by day through the best part of the summer, reading and writing in a tongue not understood by the people. We have not made his acquaintance yet, nor that of the rank and fashion of Porthcarno, so we may wait while Mavrones' yacht is still on the seas, and introduce ourselves into that select society. As a matter of fact, on the first day that is of importance to the historian, the rank and fashion found themselves reduced in number, and celebrated the occasion by throwing stones into the water from a point which usually lay under a ban. On most days there were three visitors on the beach ; two children playing somewhat drcarily, and a kind aunt alternately reading and interfering with the games.

To-day, however, the machinations of an inscrutable providence had afflicted the aunt with rheumatism, and the children were able for once to play alone. There is no more difficult province in the study of antiquity than understanding the descriptions of ancient games: and it appears doubtful whether the occupation of these two children, fascinating as it evidently was, would be more intelligible to the outside world. The new visitor who came up in the middle of the game, and was sitting on a big stone some distance off, could only make out that it had something to do with throwing pebbles at no particular mark. After forming this conclusion, the new visitor took a small book out of the pocket of his coat and began reading it attentively and making comments with a red pencil. It was not a novel, but a volume of *Athenæus*, so this habit was not so wrong as it appears. The reader was a man about sixty, with straight features and eyes that were genial though a little dim. He wore a grey moustache and small peaked beard, which gave him the look of an old French general, like the veterans we see in pictures of Napoleon's wars. The effect was increased by the large cloak that wrapped his shoulders, and the slight air of melancholy that hung about his face. He read steadily for some time, and when he next looked up, noticed the game was over and the two children playing apart—at least, the little boy was still sitting, and throwing stones, while his sister was walking up and down the beach with eyes full of tears, which were unsuccessfully screened by a broad hat and an air of indifference. The new visitor shut up his book and walked down the beach towards her. No doubt, the little thing, whom nine years of the world had taught hypocrisy, would have tried to avoid the

stranger's path, but he stopped her with a direct question :

"I want so much to see the cave—can you show me the way?"

Perhaps even then she would have run away to hide the obvious fact that she had been crying, but it struck her that his words had a foreign accent, and she had never seen a Frenchman close before. She looked at him with interest, and being pleased with his sympathetic appearance, and flattered at an appeal for assistance from a grown-up person, condescended to reply :

"Oh, yes; I'll shew you the way. You'd better take my hand, because it's rather slippery."

The cave was not far, but by the time they had reached it the little conductress was in good spirits again. All other thoughts had been drowned in the anxiety to save her charge from slipping on the seaweed. He was, of course, greatly impressed by the beauty and size of the cave; it was so high that when he held the little girl up at arm's length she could only just touch the roof with a stick. After they had explored the cave sufficiently, they came back again over the seaweed.

"There is a bigger cave," said the child, "much bigger, over the rocks—more than a mile off. We went there once in a carriage."

"You know the place very well. Have you been here a long time?"

"Oh yes: we have been here ever so long. Three weeks, I think it is. I and Aunt Martha and that boy." She pointed somewhat stiffly at the square little figure of her brother, who was still throwing stones with a theatrical exaggeration of gaiety.

"That boy! He your brother?"

"Yes—but I don't like him a bit: not a bit," she repeated with the tears coming again to her eyes.

"You don't like your brother!"

"Well, perhaps in a way I do. But he is very horrid to me sometimes."

"What has he done?"

"Well, we were playing a game over there. I think it is a silly game, but he would make me play it."

"What was the game?"

"Oh, he said we were a man-of-war—at least I was a man-of-war, and he was a gun-boat . . . only pretending, you know."

"Yes: I see: it was nice of him to let you be the man-of-war and he only a little gun-boat himself."

"Oh, you don't know Digby! . . ." she answered with a tragically expressive shake of the head. "The man-of-war was fighting two French ships and being beaten, and the gun-boat came up to help it—and you see, we couldn't make the French ships fire back, so . . ." She stopped short and blushed: "Oh! I am so sorry, I forgot you were a Frenchman!"

"I? I'm not a Frenchman."

"But you're not English are you?"

"No. I am a Greek. But tell me about the French ships."

It took a few moments to master what a Greek was, and to think how odd it must be to be one.

"Well, the French ships couldn't fire back properly: so we had to make the water splash as if it was shooting back at us, and he said I must sit in a very splashy place, because I was almost sunk by the French ships, but he came up and beat them and saved me. Don't you think it is a silly game?"

• “Well—perhaps that depends on how it is played. But what happened after that?”

“Oh, he was horrid. He said I was cheating, just because I got up where the water couldn’t wet me so much: and I told him I was quite wet already—and he said that then it didn’t matter if I got wetter.”

• “And after that?” • •

“Then he said girls were no good, and I couldn’t throw stones half so far as he could . . . and I’m sure I can. And then he called me names, so I told him . . .”

• “What did you tell him?”

“I told him his face was dirty, and that I would tell Aunt Martha that he made holes in the nursery wall with his knife. And he called me names again, and I said I wouldn’t play.” She was now in tears again, but they were tears of a softer kind, and at last yielded completely to Consolation, who appeared in the shape of an orange from the pocket of the old gentleman’s huge cloak. She discussed the whole feud dispassionately, and was even induced to admit that she was sorry for her share in the quarrel, and would really like to be friends again, only it was he who was in the wrong, and besides she knew he wouldn’t make it up. “He never will now. • I daresay we shall never once speak to each other again.”

“I think he would, if you asked him.”

“No; Digby is so proud: he knows we are proud of him and Aunt Martha says he presumes upon it . . .

“His name is Digby—really!” said the new visitor with a smile. “But what is yours?”

“My name is Madge, but Digby always calls me Mudge.”

• “That is too bad of him; but I should try to make it

up all the same . . . You haven't begun your oranges yet : here is another for you."

She took the second orange with some hesitation. "Am I to give it to Digby?"

"Just as you like—it is your own," said the old Greek.

"All right," said Madge. "You'll wait for me, won't you?" And so she ran off to her brother. Apparently his *hauteur* was not proof against the pleasures of the palate. After a little sulking he accepted the orange and consented to be reconciled.

They both went back together to where their benefactor was sitting upon the stone, and Madge continued her conversation. As a set off to her condescension in making the first offers of friendship, she now patronized her brother openly, and made him feel his great social inferiority in talking to elderly strangers. Digby stood rather glumly by, and began to eat the fruit he had just peeled.

"Do you like oranges without sugar?" he said at last in a husky tone, indicative of shyness and suffering.

"O, no:" said the stranger. "Come into my lodgings and I will give you some sugar." So saying he got up and led the way across the street to a house directly opposite, while Madge took the opportunity of whispering: "Digby, how can you?" The old gentleman opened the front door—Porthcarno doors are innocent of latch keys and yield to a turn of the handle. The children followed him upstairs to a room just like most other rooms at seaside lodgings, —one sofa, one armchair, a large rickety table, a small rickety table, two flowers in pots and a mantelpiece adorned by artificial flowers in glass cases, which the old man, if he had really been a Frenchman,

would probably have described as *désolantes*; the only peculiarities of the chamber were a great number of books, some large and handsome, some in tattered paper covers, and a charming view of the sea. The last named struck Madge's attention first.

"I hope you are fond of scenery," she said, as her host went up to a cupboard to get some sugar for the oranges: "I am devoted to it."

This little flight in grown-up conversation was too much for the oppressed Digby who growled:

"Don't you believe her; she always says things like that. So does Aunt Martha. I tell her——"

"Here is the sugar, and there is a plate," said the host, interrupting the fraternal onslaught, which might have been renewed had not Madge seized the opportunity to start safer themes.

"What a nice photograph this is. I like photographs."

She took down from the mantelpiece the portrait of a young man with straight features and a somewhat melancholy look in his eyes—a face very like that of her host and consoler. She went across to the window where the latter was sitting, and perched herself upon his knee. "Who is it?" she said, showing the photograph.

"That is my son," said the old man, looking at it.

"Is he coming down here soon?"

"No; he is a long way off."

"How far? London?"

"Much further. He is on his way to Tartary, to the Desert of Gobi. Do you know where that is?"

"Ye—es—at least, I know whereabouts it is."

"That's a story," observed Digby. "Where is it, then?"

"You just be quiet. I know very well where it is."

"Where what is?" asked the truculent one, triumphantly. "She doesn't even know the name."

Their host, ignoring these family jars, had produced a large atlas and opened it at the map of Asia. "There it is," he said, pointing to the long row of letters indicating Mongolia. The two guests came up and looked.

"I see it," said Madge, "'Great Desert of Gobi or Shamo.'" She felt, however, that her geographical pretensions had been a little upset, and added carelessly, "Ah, yes! I knew it better by the other name." This brazen imposture was of course not to be tolerated.

"O, I say," cried Digby, "I don't believe you ever heard either of the names before!" Whereupon she turned her back upon him with impressive disdain. Poor little thing, she didn't know any more than the rest of us, what an ill-looking thing is false pretension to knowledge. But, after all, it was the pitiless frankness of a relative which had forced her to use whatever weapons she could command, and what weapon is simpler or more natural than deceit? No doubt a good deal of it was modelled on observation of Aunt Martha.

Possibly she felt a little ashamed of herself, for she got up again upon the old gentleman's knee, as a kind of appeal for sympathy.

"That is a long way off. Do the people eat you there?"

"They don't eat you, but there are great bands of robbers who kill you, and nothing grows there, so the travellers sometimes starve; and it is so cold that it sometimes kills them. And the people who live near there—not the robbers, but the ordinary people—won't let Englishmen come among them."

"But why did you let your son go? I'm sure I would never let my children go to such a place."

"Well you see, my son is grown up and can do what he likes."

"But aren't you very anxious about him?"

"Yes, I am. He was hoping to go through China with a lot of soldiers when I last heard from him, but he hadn't yet finished the voyage to China."

"Ah, I am glad he writes to you!—some sons are so provoking!" said the experienced matron. "Will you tell me when you hear about him again?"

"Yes. I'll tell you when I get my next letter. But when he reaches the desert he won't be able to send letters to me any more. I shall have to wait till he comes back again to China, and then he's going to send me a telegram."

"Perhaps he'll be killed by the robbers, and then he won't come back at all," was another grim comment of Digby's.

"Oh, I'm sure he will," cried Madge, with genuine feeling, for once, and not merely a desire to "score" off Digby. "Don't you mind what *he* says. I'm certain your son 'll come back safe. But you'll tell me, won't you, if you hear anything about him?"

"Yes, I'll tell you," said the old man; "but Digby did not mean to say anything disagreeable." He smiled at the truculent one, who only justified himself:

"Well, of course I hope he'll come back all right, but he may very likely be killed by robbers, mayn't he? And he may get starved, or all sorts of things."

"Yes, I am afraid he may. . . . Now you must say good-bye, because I've got to do my lessons," said the old man with a smile. "Take another orange, Digby."

You don't do lessons," observed Digby, the De-

tector of Falsehood, as he picked out the largest orange on the dish.

"I don't think Aunt Martha would like him to have another now," said Madge cautiously.

"Well, he can take it home, and see what Aunt Martha says."

"Very well. Good-bye," she said. "Mind you tell me about your son."

"Yes; I'll tell you the next thing I hear," said the old man, smiling to himself as he said good-bye to Digby, and took two or three books out of the row upon the table and sat down to read.

The two children walked off, amicably enough, down the street to Aunt Martha's lodgings.

"What's his name?" said Digby.

"I didn't ask him," said Madge.

"Why didn't you? You're always so stupid."

"Because it's very rude to be inquisitive. And besides, I asked the postman yesterday."

"Then I don't see why you're not just as inquisitive as me, because . . . &c., &c. What did the postman say?"

"He said he couldn't remember it properly, but it was something like Maloney."

CHAPTER VI.

WHERE was it that Mavrones sat in his tent and finished a letter to the old man at Porthcarno, while the Chinese postman in blood-curdling armour leant upon his naked spear and smiled foolishly at Baj, who regarded him with stern indifference? It is difficult to say exactly where it was. They certainly had long passed the Great Wall and even the belt of civilization that extends beyond it. They had crossed one range of mountains, which, however, had not their names written upon them, and about which they were not allowed to ask questions. Their conductors had mostly avoided large towns, though occasionally they had been entertained by a municipality in the official guest-house. They may or may not have seen curious customs and strange scenery, they may even have made discoveries quite unknown to European science, but to say whether they really have done so or no, would be a breach of the conditions of Man-sse-Kong. At any rate Mavrones was now writing a letter in his tent. The tent was one of a large encampment, for Man-sse-Kong, with that munificence for which he is justly famed, had organized their expedition on the very grandest scale. They had cooks and doctors and spiritual advisers, they had valets and grooms and waiters and huntsmen, and in fact everything but an interpreter. The last was rigidly forbidden by Man-sse-Kong, and the precaution was quite successful, for Mavrones and Baj while they worked at Mongol had paid no attention to Chinese. There were fifty men-

at-arms to kill the blackbeetles, and in case of need to get out of the way of any company of banditti which might threaten to obstruct the path. The last addition to the troop consisted of two camels who between them carried a large flat-bottomed boat.

They had reached a desolate and sterile country. Long stretches of flat sand or low round hills as far as eye could see, the monotony only broken by the abrupt and stony ravines, that seemed to be cleft almost causelessly here and there among the barren wastes, narrow and precipitous, and full of danger to one who rode by night. The hills were only drifts of sand. There was a scanty growth of coarse, dry grass here and there; the horses and camels made their muzzles sore in trying to crop it—it clung so close to the ground. It had a salt taste, and there was no water to slake the thirst it caused. For those weltering black lagoons that lay here and there on the horizon were bitter and fetid, and the slimy weeds which floated on the surface of them were perhaps poisonous as well as foul to the smell. The animals would not look at them.

To-day there was a new feature in the landscape, one which seemed to cause commotion among the cooks and philosophers and men-at-arms. The air, hitherto dry and parching, was filled with a sort of moisture, like the mist that rises at night in the country by a river. Only this was an acrid mist; a mist with a bitter taste that hurt the throat, and a hot sulphurous smell. It was very slightly perceptible up to the afternoon; but the cause of it was obvious. They were drawing near the place from which it emanated—a hot lake it must have been; for there was clearly water there, and above rose thick clouds of

vapour, covering all the face of the lake and shutting out the view beyond.

It was sunset when they pitched that evening in the open desert, and Mavrones wrote the letter to Porth-carno. The man-at-arms was evidently in a hurry, so far as the temperament of his nation admits that condition of mind. So Mavrones finished his letter quickly and Wibbling immediately began his. There were some unusual preparations going on. Mavrones had rather expected that this was almost the goal of their journey, and that the soldiers and escort now meant to leave them and return to Peking. So, as he sat wrapped in sheepskins, close to the door of the tent, (for the sudden cold at sundown prevented him from showing his face outside,) and watched the operations of the soldiers, his only care was whether they would carry the tent and the camels off with them and leave him and his friends at the mercy of the desert. He remembered that Man-ssc-Kong had said something about supplying proper provisions, so he hoped at least they would not starve. But it soon appeared that the departure was not so general as he imagined. All the soldiers went it is true; so did the philosophers and pages and physicians, coming up one by one and making obeisances to all three Englishmen; last of all the small civil-mandarin, having apologised profoundly for leaving his "Elder Brothers" in such a place, and explained that it was only because he, the Extremely-Little, was unworthy of such superfine society any longer, ended by handing over to Mavrones a large note with an official seal; then the cavalcade of them departed in due ceremony, not for the direction in which they had come, but forward, and a little to the South.

"What's in the letter?" said Baj.

"It's from Man-sse-Kong in Mongol. He says that these people will go and encamp in a valley to the South of the Hot Lake, and wait for us three months. We are to make signals . . . but there's the letter."

"I suppose we're near the place then," said Wibbling. "If it's as full of sulphur and mist as this is, the sooner we go back the better."

"It may be just beyond the lake," said Mavrones. "They've left the boat with us."

And then came a gesticulating scullion, one of the few left, to announce that dinner was ready.

The night they spent was a painful one, sleepless and heavy, cold with the congealing vapours and biting to the eyes and throat with the strong sulphur fumes. Yet when the sun rose up, the guides were preparing for a further journey into the heart of the mist, and the travellers found them busy with the flat-bottomed boat when they came down to look at the water. The Patent Collapsible boat was there too; but that was only part of the travellers' baggage, and still lay in two halves folded up, with handles to them, like two large empty carpet-bags turned the wrong side out. They walked down to the edge of the lake. It was worth looking at: water of a whitish brown hue rolling in short violent waves to the shore, which was bare and sandy and scarcely higher than the surface of the lake. Just above the water was a clear space through which they saw the long boiling of waves, and dimly discerned a shore upon the opposite side, a different looking shore from this level desert. Above the clear interval rose the vapours thicker and more heavy, and shut out the light of day.

The boat was launched and the party embarked

upon the lake. Not a word was spoken ; the Chinese, forbidden to hold any converse with the strangers, had become silent even among themselves. Mavrones and Baj and even Wibbling were influenced by the silence round them, and sat wondering at the curious phenomena of the lake. Perhaps, too, the mephitic vapour had a stupefying effect. The boat held closely into the windings of the shore, instead of going straight across the lake. This at first had surprised the three travellers ; but suddenly, when they were nearly half way across, Mavrones broke the silence. " Look," he said, pointing a little in front of them to the left. Baj turned and saw what had struck his friend—a wild whirl of bubbling water, and in the midst two great columns spouting into the air, half lost in steam, half falling back noisily into the lake and setting the dead white water in fierce turmoil. No boat could ever have passed there. Even close to the shore at this point the waves were quick and high, and the boat rocked and swung perilously. But soon this place of danger was left behind, and the dim white of the water and mist returned with its old monotony. Quite suddenly, as it seemed, about two in the afternoon, a black wall of rock rose in front, and they found the end of the lake was near. The mists were less thick at this extremity, owing, no doubt, to its greater distance from the boiling springs. The travellers looked up at the great rock which seemed an impassable barrier to their progress, a prison wall with no breach or gateway ; only at the top there was a space of air among all that blackness, a steep valley cloven between the heights, and suddenly out of this great cleft, five hundred feet above their heads, came a gleam of brightness cutting sharply through the mist and then disappearing as the boat went on. The

first welcome in the land they had chosen to seek, they saw what it was as the boat reached the shore and they disembarked, a flash of sunlight on a gigantic sword that stood upright on the edge of the enormous rock, a menace and a message of war.

The boat drew to land at a little cove near the north-west corner of the lake, where there was a narrow space of beach. They had been travelling, of course, westward, and had skirted the northern shore of the lake. Except for this nook, the water washed right up to the foot of the rocks, and here and there ran under them into caves and channels of which one could not see the end. The mouths of them were large, and the hollow moaning that came from within, and sometimes grew to the loudness of a thunder-clap, seemed to show that the water had eaten its way far inward, perhaps miles and miles beyond the outer wall.

The beach sloped rapidly, and the Chinese carried the collapsible boat and the other baggage—a great deal there was of it, mostly provisions and fire-arms and Teubner texts—to the highest point of the sand. Some they even deposited on ledges of rock.

“They’re taking a great deal of trouble, Baj,” said Mavroncs; “do you suppose there can be a tide here?”

“There can’t be a tide, but perhaps they think there can.”

The Chinese stacked all the luggage, lighted a fire, built an embankment of sand and put up a tent on the top of it. Next they proceeded to cook a dinner which, in spite of all adverse conditions imaginable, turned out to be rather more luxurious than usual; waited during the meal, washed up the dishes, and then one after the other with hasty obeisance went back to the great flat boat and rowed away.

The day was drawing near sunset, and the three Englishmen were left upon the sands.

"This is the mountain," said Mavrones at last ; "we may be among the Greeks to-morrow."

"Is it possible to get up the rock ?" suggested Wibbling.

"There are plenty of ledges in the first fifty feet," said Baj, "and we must somehow get out of this sulphur."

"What shall we do with the provisions, and guns, and things ?"

"Leave them here. We can always come down."

"What's the signal for calling back the Chinese, in case we want them? You saw Man-sse-Kong's letter."

"Fire rifles and light a fire at the top of the rock."

"But, I say, they won't be able to hear at that distance."

"They are to camp quite close here, on the south-west side of the lake."

So saying, Baj turned to examine the ways of ascent, but Mavrones was already before him and some dozen yards up the rock. "Quite easy climbing," he cried ; "and there are artificial steps just above."

The rock was of slate, in enormous blocks, with the clean-cut ledges usual in such formations. Mavrones soon reached the steps and ran up till he got footing in the narrow gorge which divided the two nearest peaks. There were rows of hill tops on every side, generally not more than a thousand feet high, but all built of rock and precipitous. But towards the south-west the height increased, and some fifty miles away rose a mountain of many thousand feet, rough

stones below, and above, pinnacles of gleaming ice. The gorge in which Mavrones stood ran in a little way towards a high wall composed of slate and granite, and then turned sharply to the left ; what was beyond remained hidden. The others soon scaled the rock, and were standing at Mavrones' side.

"What a tremendous sword," said Wibbling. "I wonder who keeps it clean."

As this was not a question to be hastily decided, they walked further down the valley. There was nobody to be seen. As they reached the part where the gorge turned off to the left, the great icy mountain came full in front of them.

"That is the place," cried Mavrones ; "you remember the description :

*πέτραν πυρὸς ματέρ', ἀμφὶ τὰν αἰὲ
κρυσταλλολαμπεῖς νιφοβλάτες ἔρεψαν αἱμοί.*

It is volcanic."

There was a solemnity in treading at last on the very rocks from which Hegesias had come, but still there was no sign of life, except, perhaps, the sword. The steps leading up the face of the rock were evidently of great age, and were broken suddenly off towards the bottom. The hands that cut them might be dead for centuries. The gorge wound in and out, rising continually till it became a kind of pass over the ridge in front. From the top of this *col* they saw some distance down over a scene formed by the same giant piles of slate and granite. But there was one new feature : a river of some size turned a sharp corner round a granite block to the right hand, and flowed on between precipitous banks in the direction the travellers were taking, making a kind of cañon.

The path from the *col* where they were, led straight

down to the river, and then seemed to end ; but high up on the great ridge to the right a small broken way was occasionally discernible, which apparently led on westward into the heart of the table-land.

"Hurray ! we can use the collapsible boat," said Baj.

"Is it safe to trust a river we don't know ? • There may be waterfalls or anything, especially in a volcanic district," Mavrones replied.

"It is going quietly enough now. We can always stop if we notice the stream getting rapid."

"Well, I think it would be safer to take the path along the hills," said Mavrones.

"Let's go back for the boat," said Wibbling, and so the discussion ceased.

It was now nearly six o'clock. They went back to the ledge nearest the lake, and by the help of a rope pulled up the Collapsible One without much difficulty. Baj had gone down to fasten it. "There seems to be a tide of some kind after all," he said when he climbed up again. "The water is all but touching our store of things : it must have risen two or three feet."

Baj and Wibbling each took a section of the boat, and Mavrones followed with the oars. Suddenly the latter stopped :

"Don't you hear curious noises ?" he said to Baj.

"Yes, I can't make it out. They sound like roars and groans." They stopped to listen. The sounds continued fitfully, seeming to come from under the earth and to grow louder as they waited.

"I have it," said Baj : "of course it is the water of the lake in the caves underneath."

"It must be, but, I never heard water so loud before, and the lake is a long way off."

When they came to the *col* from which the river was visible, it was too late to think of beginning their voyage. The night was fine and they felt no regret for the tent they had left by the lake. A large fire and a supper off the provisions they had brought with them ensured a comfortable evening. On the desert below the cold would have been intolerable outside a tent, just as the heat was during the day time. But up here for some strange reason the air seemed far milder: partly the high walls of the plateau shut out the desert wind; partly, no doubt, the water of the hot lake running under the earth had raised the whole of it to an agreeable temperature. It was a country perforated with hot water pipes.

This was the first night they had camped out alone, and they felt the enterprise was only now fairly begun. The evening passed more pleasantly than any before it, but the groaning and roaring of the water in the caves below prevented the possibility of sleep. The sounds increased in loudness as the night wore on, till at last they seemed like legions of evil spirits howling under the earth; then they grew softer again, and after sunrise our friends began to get a little rest. They rose comparatively late, and, after breakfast, decided first to bring the tent and most of the baggage up to the top of the rocks for convenience sake, and then to start upon the river. A few hours of hard work completed their first task, and early in the afternoon they carried the boat down to the river and launched her. As Baj and he were putting in the oars and provisions, Mavrones heard the sound of a stone whizzing through the air, and Wibbling exclaimed:

"First living thing I've seen in the country! and I've hit it too!"

"What was it?" said Mavrones.

"A kind of Stinker," was the answer, a name, gentle reader, in some circles habitually applied to rabbits. Mavrones walked to where the little animal lay, stunned apparently by the blow. It was a kind he did not recognize. He took it with him to the boat and pulled up some grass for it to eat when it recovered. Wibbling was furious: though Mavrones had said nothing, the implied disgust at his behaviour stung him: besides he despised such effeminate sentimentality. • •

As there were only four sculls, Mavrones sat in the stern. They were all tired owing to the two sleepless nights they had passed, and the rowing was not very vigorous. The stream went leisurely on between enormous banks of rock, with ledges here and there running along the surface, where tufts of long thin grass kept a difficult hold. After half an hour Baj made a suggestion:

"We are too tired to row, let us lie down and go to sleep: you can watch for the first two hours, Mavrones, then wake me up and I'll take your place."

It was agreed, and Mavrones assumed a watchful attitude while the others lay down and slept. It was a sultry day, but the sun scarcely ever touched the water at the bottom of that deep cañon, and the boat drifted on in a warm twilight. Mavrones was very happy. He went over all the past in his mind, his first discovery of the MS., how he had laboured to make out the first few lines, from mere curiosity and because he thought it looked difficult: and how, after the first few lines, the curiosity had become a burning excitement that made him forget everything besides: and how he sat from sunrise to sunset the next day without a break till he read the whole through, and

only then had leisure to remember that he was very hungry and had had nothing to eat. Then he thought of his letter to Baj and the first plan of the expedition: what fearful work it would have been to run by night through savage tribes, hiding in holes and rocks; why, the cold would have killed them if nothing else, and ten to one they would never have reached the wonderful country after all. How angry Clearista was at the whole idea: it was rather unreasonable of her. But then she was very imaginative and had perhaps fancied the dangers greater than they were . . . Dangers! why what danger could there be! Here he was at the very threshold of the great discovery, and all had been so simple and pleasant, all like this swift gliding down the dark cool river . . . Then he thought of the things that were waiting for him when he should reach the Greek city itself—to-morrow perhaps it might be;—poems and dramas and histories, systems of the early sages long lost to the Western World, probably original literature sprung from the affliction of this nation of exiles; a strange rare fruit it would be, grown upon such peculiar soil. All this in store for him in a few days, perhaps in a few hours! And to think of gaining it so easily, to go in state under Imperial protection, surrounded with cooks and philosophers, instead of struggling alone through snow and mountain and fearing the eye of every man in the land. And was not this the most pleasant of all, this quick smooth gliding down the stream; how swift it was! he could feel the air blow upon his cheeks as they swept along.

"Mavrones, Mavrones, you cursed fool! Wake up," cried a harsh voice, "or we shall all be killed!"

He started from his dream, to see the white angry face of Wibbling, and to hear the noise of falling

water. The boat was shooting down the stream at a fearful pace. Wibbling seized his sculls and backed with all his might: it was no use, the current was far too strong for any rowing powers to avail. The only chance was to thrust an oar into a crevice in the rock, if any crevice appeared. Mavrones was wide awake now, worse tortured by his own shame than by the savage abuse and curses of Wibbling: he felt he deserved more. He held an oar ready to jam into the first opening that should appear. The boat was near the bank and was drawing close upon a corner round which the cataract must be. Looking down, he saw that Baj was still asleep: the sight made his misery more intense: his friend had no thought of the death that was coming so inevitably near through his fatal folly. Should he wake him? It was no use; and he scarcely dared to do so. His eyes fell on the little animal he had rescued from Wibbling's hands, which now lay munching its grass at the bottom of the boat. At least he could save that life. He took the creature in one hand, and, as they swept by, threw it up carefully to a little cluster of grass and bush, that stuck out from a cranny a few feet above their heads. It alighted safely and ran away along the ledge of rock. . . . Would there ever be a cleft to fix his oar in? Wibbling, paralysed with fear, could only curse Mavrones and shiver at the thought of death. At last the cleft appeared. Mavrones drove the scull hard into it; the boat stopped for a moment, but the strain was terrible upon the oar. Would it hold? He shouted to Wibbling for aid, but Wibbling was in a senseless panic, and could do nothing but curse. "Why had he not roused Baj? "Baj, wake up," he cried, "shove another scull in here! Another scull! wake up!" That heavy

sleeper turned slowly and raised himself on his elbow. "What is it?" he said, as the oar snapt and the boat shot forward with a bound, rounded the corner, and came within sight of the cataract. The boat's pace quickened still. There was a long sweep of rapids before the actual fall. No one spoke, Wibbling only pointed inarticulately to the top of the rocks on the left bank. Baj was awake, and took in the situation instantly. He caught hold of the other scull; Mavrones still held the broken one, and the two men stood silently watching if no other crevice would present itself in the rocks.

Suddenly there was a shout overhead, a loud shout of warning; and at the same moment a long rope swung down from the top of the rocks, falling right across Wibbling's body as he lay stretched in the bow of the boat. He hardly tried to catch it, but Mavrones dropped his oar and made a wild clutch as the rope swept by in the air. He caught it; then came a jerk and a wrench, that almost tore his arms out of the socket. His left foot happened to be bent under the seat, and the ankle gave way with a violent sprain. Involuntarily he almost let the rope slip out of his hands, when Baj grasped it and held the boat steady. A moment more and Wibbling had hold too, and all three pulled their best to get the boat up stern first against the stream. The water rushed high over the stern, and began to flood in. At the same time the rope seemed to shorten. It was evidently being pulled up from the top of the rocks. In a few seconds all three were in the water, still clinging to the rope for dear life and struggling to the shore. The lowest ledge of rock was full six feet high, but the force above was strong enough to pull them through the water and up to the ledge almost before

They realized what was happening. Once on land, Mavrones let go, and looked round just in time to see, amid a white shower of spray, the last leap of the brave Collapsible, as it plunged empty over the cataract, true to its name in the hour of dissolution.

Mavrones lay back, sick with the pain of his ankle, which he was only just beginning to feel. He closed his eyes and his head swam.

Baj, meantime, had walked along the ledge to the left, looking for a way up to the top of the cliff: he found himself balked in that direction and came back to find Mavrones just coming to himself again.

"Why, you're hurt, Mav," he said, "what is the matter?" as he stooped over him.

"It's my ankle—" explained Mavrones vaguely, and Baj knelt down to undo his boot.

While thus engaged, he heard a sound of footsteps and a sudden cry, and, looking round, saw Wibbling pinioned and held down by a number of small, darkish men with Mongolian faces, who had come down a steep path to the right. Baj's first idea was to shew fight; yet it was obviously these people who had pulled them out of the water; they might be friendly, and at any rate it was futile to attack them, as they were more than ten to one, and had spears besides. They laid down the spears as they approached, and shouted to Baj in a strange language. This was obviously a sign of peace, so Baj put off his defensive attitude and responded as best he could to their smiles. He pointed out the condition of Mavrones, who had just come to himself again, and was sitting up. "Here are some natives," said Baj to him. He looked round and asked anxiously: "Surely not the Greeks, are they?"

"Are you Hellenes?" asked Baj in Greek. They

did not understand: he repeated the word once or twice. At last they seemed to comprehend. "Hel-lenes," cried one, nodding his head, and others followed suit. They had released Wibbling, and now came up, and offered to carry Mavrones. He tried to walk, but, finding himself unable, consented to be carried. "If they really are the Greeks," he said to Baj, "I wish we had died before we came here!"

The quaint, stunted savages were of a yellow hue with pigs' eyes and a cunning expression. There was a lurking ferocity under their ludicrousness, which gave rise in the helpless travellers to many misgivings. Yet their whole demeanour was friendly, and the throwing of the rope must have been a deliberate act of goodwill. For Wibbling explained that he had been originally awaked by the sound of voices, and had seen these men running along the top of the rocks gesticulating and warning him back from the direction of the waterfall. Their clothing amounted practically to nothing, though some few wore long Mongol gowns. They were strongly made, but quite unintelligent. Mavrones eyed them with horrible misgivings; it was just possible they might be Europeans degraded by intercourse with the Mongol nomads and perhaps by conquest and servitude. The party climbed up to the top of the rocks, and then wound its way along a series of mountain paths for about half-an-hour, when Wibbling showed signs of exhaustion. The guides immediately carried both him and Baj, with a sudden burst of laughter. They travelled on in this manner for a couple of hours till they reached a pleasant-looking plain. The vegetation was rich and rather like that of Southern China, yet the height above the sea must have been considerable, as they had not descended much since

the morning. A large forest was visible in the distance ; in front were traces of indifferent agriculture and a good deal of open unclaimed grass land. At the back came the mountain peaks.

After about half-an-hour's journey along the plain, behind a cluster of trees, they espied a number of men seated as if at a picnic. On closer inspection there were six placed in two rows and diligently engaged in scratching upon large slates, apparently taking down the words of a man who sat with his back to a tree, and from whose shoulders flowed a long robe of scarlet and gold embroidery. At either side of this person stood two more savages in the national dress, holding up between them a large umbrella.

One of the guides ran forward, fell on his knees and spoke to the man with the embroidered robe, who turned and looked ; then put on his spectacles and looked again. He was taller than any of the savages around him, though he had a narrow chest and a decided stoop. His face was pale, long and hairless, with high cheek bones and a large, well-shaped mouth, almost too stern, at first sight, to be agreeable. He had black, curly hair, and penetrating black eyes, with the large pupils usual in short-sighted people. He had an absent manner and a serious expression, but, withal, there was a strong suggestion of the Mongol about him, without either the cunning of the Chinese or the grossness of the Tartar. Besides the long robe, he wore a short tunic and rather elaborate buskins.

He looked hard through his spectacles at the three strangers ; then, as they came quite near, the colour mounted quickly to his cheeks, and he advanced to meet them with a somewhat fierce or sullen expression.

"May I ask your names?" he said abruptly, and yet with a certain ceremoniousness of manner, which showed he was not quite at his ease. "How did you come here?"

Baj struggled down from his bearers' shoulders.

"We came down the river in a collapsible boat," he replied, "and were very near having an accident when——"

"You came to the waterfall—yes; what then?"

"These people let down a rope to us and pulled us up."

He hesitated a moment. "That was fortunate," he said; then, turning round, spoke to one of the guides, who answered volubly. Baj could not understand the language he used, but thought the tone sounded severe.

"He 'got the rope from a rope bridge across the ravine there," said the stranger. "He ought to have finished it three days ago, but evidently he hasn't, or the rope wouldn't have been available."

He turned again to the native and seemed to reprove him sharply, while Baj and Wibbling stood shivering and embarrassed.

Suddenly Mavrones, who had been lying back without joining in the conversation, sat up and asked abruptly:

"Are you the man who blotted the *theta* in the MS. at Arganthus?"

The stranger blushed and looked round sharply. "I fear I am," he said, "though it was always one of the things I could never forgive a man for doing."

"Are these people the Greeks?" asked Mavrones again, breathlessly hanging upon the answer.

"The Greeks? Good Heavens, no!" said the stranger, with a pleasant laugh. "These are only the Sanni."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Mavrones, as he fell back again into the arms of his bearers.

There was another pause, which the travellers occupied in shivering and wonder, the stranger in looking at his boots, and plucking the golden hem of his cloak. Suddenly he broke the silence.

"I am afraid you are very wet. Won't you come into the palace and have some tea? Perhaps I ought to introduce myself: my name is Trench, late of Balliol College, Oxford."

"We shall be delighted, I am sure," said Baj: "we have been a little hurt by our accident." Then the three friends introduced themselves in turn.

The stranger gave a brief direction to the men carrying Mavrones, and then said to Baj:

"Will you be good enough to follow me, Mr. Baj; unless you prefer being carried?"

"Are you the chief of these people?" asked Wibbling.

"Well strictly speaking," said Trench simply, "I am a concentration of local executives, and a removable autocrat by divine right."

CHAPTER VII.

"Is he a lunatic?" whispered Wibbling to Baj, as they walked in the direction indicated.

"How am I to know?" was the reply, and they followed the Autocrat in silence. The way led through a pleasant country; clumps of large trees rose out of the open plain, and here and there bright flowers of blue, crimson, and pearly white, started up in sheltered corners. The mountain peaks formed a background on every side. In about a quarter of an hour they reached what seemed to be the skirts of a forest, but there was a broad road leading in among the trees. A few minutes' walk through the grove brought them in sight of the palace, a huge square building of red granite with a colonnade of Doric columns and some elaborate sculpture over the entrance, representing to all appearance a young man upon a throne with a scourge in his hand, and a great concourse of worshippers kneeling around him. There was a broad space in front, and rows of trees were growing in the colonnade. A number of sentinels or porters came forward to meet the party, kneeling on the ground as Trench approached. He took no notice of their obeisance; but, going up to one man, spoke a few words and lifted his hand as if to strike. The newcomers noticed then for the first time that he carried a small knotted whip with several strings. The man answered quickly, with a smile, deprecating the blow.

"It's all right," said Trench, turning back to our friends; "they have made tea."

"Really," said Wibbling. "How did they know we were coming?"

"I am afraid I cannot answer with certainty; but I always beat them if they are not ready with a thing when I want it."

They entered the palace and found themselves in a long lofty hall, the floor and walls of smooth granite, but the former covered through its whole length with a single rich rug. A door upon the left was open and they caught sight of a long banquet-chamber, with statues in niches and a dark table wonderfully carved. However, they passed on to the end of the hall, where, turning through a passage to the right, they discovered a small square room fitted with soft carpets and couches of curious colours, rich and subdued, producing a beautiful effect with the rough granite of the walls. The one large window commanded a view of broad plains and sombre groves, the foreground strewn thick with bright wild flowers like an early Italian picture, and at the back jagged mountain ridges standing sharply out against a blue but rather cloudy sky.

There was a China tea service upon the table, and water boiling aloud in a golden urn. "Do you take milk and honey?" said the autocrat, "They don't like giving it you here. I get it as a sacrifice, but I am afraid I cannot manage to give you any—or at any rate, much."

As he spoke, a knock came at the door and a servant entered with a little gold jar, worked with reliefs, which he presented to Trench, kneeling and bowing his head. Trench took the jar and poured some of the contents into his cup; then, after a

moment's hesitation, handed it to Mavrones, who was nearest to him, saying :

"There is some for one of you ; leave enough for my next cup."

"Thank you, I really do not care for milk and sugar," said the mendacious Mavrones, handing the jar to Wibbling, who helped himself and returned it to the autocrat. The others drank their plain tea, a beverage they both abhorred, with a surprise which quite got the better of annoyance. It seemed no use asking questions where every single circumstance was a puzzle. At any rate, it was a relief to sit down and rest, and as their host was not in a communicative humour none of them cared to force the conversation. He seemed, from his face and brow, a man of great brain power, and the Sannians evidently trembled before him. He paid no regard to any one but himself, and by this time did not even seem constrained by the presence of the strangers.

"Is there anything new at Oxford?" said the concentration of Local Executives after his first cup of tea.

"Oh, yes," said Wibbling ; "there are the New Schools they have just finished, and there are two new Heads of Houses in the last year. . . . And they have given the football men their blue."

"Really," said Trench without interest.

"And they've got permission from the Vice-Chancellor for a Theatre and a Nonconformist College : I think I shall very likely act there."

"Ah," remarked the Autocrat.

"And they have started concerts in Balliol Hall ; and there's a new Librarian at the Bodleian : and they've abolished Rudiments."

"The deuce they have!" cried Trench, and sat thoughtfully for a few minutes.

"A charming place you have here," said Wibbling vaguely.

"Yes: isn't it. It was built expressly for me before I came . . . May I give you some more tea?"

"No more for me, thank you," said Mavrones. "Would you allow me to take my boot off? I have sprained my ankle."

"O pray do so—Sprained your ankle eh? Why didn't those donkeys send for a doctor." So saying he touched a bell and took hold of the scourge. As soon as the servant appeared Trench struck him sharply two or three times, and appeared to ask some question in the language of the place. The man answered with great rapidity and Trench ceased striking him.

"He says he has sent for the doctor already. You had better go upstairs and lie down."

"Many thanks: I should like to do so. What wonderful servants you have: they seem to anticipate everything one can wish."

"Yes? I'm glad you like them. It's all the result of a system you know. I have to beat them whenever I ask for anything if they haven't got it ready beforehand. I expect they'll be here in a moment to carry you upstairs." He touched the bell and two men instantly appeared.

"May I ask why you beat them so much?" said Mavrones, as the bearers lifted him.

"Oh, it is my business. It's the only thing I am here for."

Mavrones would have liked to ask for further explanations, but the bearers carried him out of the apartment and up a flight of stairs till they

reached a room on the first floor where they deposited him upon a bed, or rather a large sofa, consisting chiefly of cushions; and then, after bringing hot water and towels and all that is considered requisite to restore the exhausted, left the room backwards upon all fours.

In the room below Trench took a second cup of tea but did not offer any further remarks. Conversation was unmistakably flagging, when Baj enquired:

"May I ask in what sense you are only here to beat the people."

"It is part of their conception of royalty," answered Trench: "but I will explain it to you more fully to-morrow. I must now go back to the scribes: I will leave you here."

"Were those the scribes among whom you were sitting when we found you?"

"Yes—I dictate to them under that tree. I choose that particular place because it is a long way from the town. But the people come in crowds all the same," he continued with a sigh, "simply crowds."

"There were not so many when we saw you," said Wibbling in a controversial tone.

"No: I sent them away on errands."

"On errands?"

"Yes: for instance, the people who found you . . . I had sent them off to see about the rope bridge. Others I send to watch at various places till sundown to see if a miracle happens. I often do that on feast days."

"Do you often get a miracle, then?"

"They see visions and portents very freely. Sometimes I have to beat them if they don't . . . Then there are others I occasionally send to see how the

sword is getting on : you saw the sword ? Or I send them to wash their faces, or to sacrifice to me, or anything that comes into my head."

"Why do you want to get them out of the way ?"

"O, they jostle and interrupt. I can't work properly in a crowd. Besides they pretend to be so much edified by what I dictate, and groan and clap their hands—though they can't understand a word of it. The scribes themselves are bad enough, they are showing emotion all day long. But when you get a thousand people standing round, it's too much. I can't think at all."

"You are engaged on some work of a religious character ?" said Baj.

"No, on the contrary it is a treatise on the Metaphysical Ground of Ethics . . . I'll show you what there is of it. Come into the next room."

He preceded them through a doorway which had hitherto escaped their notice, being covered with heavy drapery, into an apartment furnished as a study. Half of it was filled with piles of slates laid flat one upon another and stacked right up to the ceiling. A similar slate lay upon a writing table, and a bundle of iron styles for engraving the slate were visible in a half-opened drawer.

"That is the book as far as I have got" said Trench, pointing to the great stacks.

"You write on slates ?" said Baj : "Do you find them more convenient than paper ?"

"I find them positively disgusting, but my wretched position forces me to use them ! I must go now. I will tell you all about it to-morrow."

"Shall we walk about the grounds till your return ?"

"Yes. I will send a guard to look after you. You

needn't beat him unless you like, but don't on any account give way to him. It makes them unmanageable. We dine at a quarter to eight."

He went off hastily, leaving Baj and Wibbling to return to the sitting-room where they had had tea. In a minute or two an attendant appeared, looking rather depressed, and invited them by signs to follow him. He led them over the greater part of the palace, and took them for a walk in the grounds. The latter were no doubt both beautiful and interesting, but both the friends were terribly tired by the events of the day, and were very glad when the guide led them back to the palace and showed the way to their respective bed-chambers. Then he ran downstairs again to bring up warm water and slippers. The former, we imagine, is much the same all the world over, but the latter were in this case of thick scarlet cloth, and covered with gold embroidery.

Left to themselves the travellers washed and changed their boots: then Wibbling laid himself upon his couch and slept, while Baj went downstairs till he met a servant, whom he terrified by one of those well-known glances of his, which suggest murder but only mean shyness, and which had apparently on this occasion much the same effect as a scourging from the King. At all events the servants at once led him to Mavrones's bed-room, where he wished to go, and where the two friends spent the time till dinner in conversation over the events of the day.

A few minutes after seven the Autocrat returned.

"How are you now?" he asked Mavrones, and then without waiting for a reply continued: "You will dine by yourselves in the ante-room here. I entertain thirty Sannian chiefs to-night, and would sooner

do so alone. I shall send them away the moment dinner is over."

"I am afraid we are giving a great deal of trouble," said Mavrones. "I am sorry we should interfere with a festivity."

"I don't mind," answered Trench simply. "I only entertain these people to keep them quiet. You'll find dinner ready when you call."

So saying he left them; and about half an hour after they heard the solemn salute of the Sannian chiefs as the King went down to receive them. They listened to the footsteps trooping into the great banquet hall: then Wibbling appeared and they called for dinner.

It is in some respects unfortunate, though at the time it gave great gratification to the three friends, that Trench of Balliol had European prejudices in the matter of cookery. He had the dinners at his court served in much the same style as at the Louvre or the First Avenue, with certain unavoidable discrepancies. One or two common articles of food were unattainable in Mongolia: one or two more, which he disliked or which disagreed with him, were forbidden to every member of the household. But otherwise there is no such interest for us in describing the different *plats*, as if dogs and birdsnests, spiders and boiled chalk, had been among the delicacies of the royal board. Mavrones Baj and Wibbling had a pleasant repast and time for conversation about their plans. They determined to sound the Autocrat upon two points especially, who, where, and of what kind were the Hellenic exiles, and how Trench himself had reached the country and obtained the royal scourge.

Soon after dinner Trench returned, followed by a couple of servants bringing coffee and a lamp. For-

tunately his food had improved his temper; Mavrones began the conversation by asking:

"About the Hellenes in this neighbourhood, are they still existing?"

"O yes. They live in a city under that mountain—the biggest, down to the South-west. It's about forty miles from here. I'm subject to them, you know, really."

"Do they keep up their language and nationality?"

"They all learn ancient Greek at school and their present language is much less changed from the old than ordinary modern Greek is. You get to understand it after a few days. The pronunciation is hard. They retain tonic accent and quantity."

"Should you call them civilized, cultivated?"

"More so than any nation in the world. Crime is unknown. Their literature is a marvel of beauty, miles before any other that I know, except of course Ancient Greek, and you should only see their buildings and statues!"

Mavrones gave a sigh of relief and intense pleasure.

"But they have odd ideas you know. They're very exclusive: then they're all vegetarians and spend half their time in educating the lower animals."

"Dear me, how is that?"

"Well, they generally use dogs for hall-porters and messengers, so they have to educate them beforehand. They first teach them to read, and then to understand spoken language."

"Do they succeed?"

"Admirably. Nearly all the old dogs in the city can read a good many words and understand what you tell them."

"There are people in England who teach dogs to sing," said Mavrones: "and I fancy Sir John Lubbock has taught one to read."

"No, he hasn't:" said Wibbling: "that was a wasp."

"What about the other animals?" asked Baj.

"Well, they did away with pigs in the sixteenth century: they were most intelligent beasts, but corrupt and untrustworthy, and it was found that education only made them worse. I believe there is something to be made out of cats."

"They must take a lot of trouble about their own education?"

"They devote their lives to it. You see, the ground is so fertile and their agricultural system so perfect, they all have plenty of leisure."

"But what about the army, the lawyers, doctors, and so on?"

"There are no lawyers; and they are all trained soldiers—not that there is any fighting now. You see, the country is almost inaccessible, and then their explosives are so powerful that even the Chinese could scarcely stand against them. I've got one of their big shells here, to use in case of a rebellion. It can be fired with perfect precision and kills practically everything within a circle of ten miles radius."

"Good Heavens! do you keep it in the house?" said Wibbling.

"Yes, there's no danger. It goes off by exposure to light, first indigo, then orange, then red, in certain portions."

"Why, what is it made of?"

"They have got a method of storing the force used in vibrations of light, something the same way as we can store electricity. It takes years to store enough

force for one of these shells; it is stored first by a big machine, more or less like an electric light engine, but it can be transmitted to a small body and lasts as long as you like."

"Do you keep it in the dark?"

"The shell is wrapped up in felt, thickly, so that no light can get in. When you want to fire it, you take off the felt coat; then there is a crystal lense in the side of the shell; you apply an indigo light and an orange light to this lense, for a few seconds each. Then on exposure to red light the force is set free, and you have your explosion."

"But how do you project it?"

"With an ordinary cannon. You project it and apply the red light at the same time. The explosive in the cannon is a stuff called *pikrites*, which explodes with a deep red flash."

"The light of the flash is enough to explode the shell?"

"Yes: after you have applied the indigo and orange. You have to be very careful after applying them, because the least suggestion of red light sends it off. But before, it is as safe as so much lead."

"How soon does it explode after the red light?"

"In about twenty seconds. It travels very fast, you know. The other two lights are just applied by holding coloured glass between it and the sun."

"It seems an extraordinary thing to be able to store the force of vibrations."

"Yes: especially for an explosive. They use the same system of storage for many purposes. It was discovered by a celebrated physicist called Agathides some three hundred years ago. The Chinese Empire was aggressive just then, and some envoys were sent

to the City to demand recognition of the Emperor's supremacy. There used to be an accessible rock-staircase at that time up to the city from behind. Well, the Greeks took these envoys to a place down below, about twenty miles from this slope, and dropped a shell on it. When the effects of the explosion were over, they marched back to the place where the slope was, and found all the rocks flung here and there, with great chasms in between, making all ascent impossible. They then sent the ambassadors back, telling them to inform the Emperor that these shells carried twenty miles with accuracy, and that they were willing to conclude an alliance on equal terms. In about a year the envoys returned accepting the alliance. One of the stipulations was that the Chinese should not reveal the existence of this people to any foreign nations. You see, that was a good bit after Hegesias' mission, when they had conquered the Sanni and were no longer in want of assistance. They have never used the shells since that, except to frighten the Sanni. Once or twice when the Sanni were disposed to rebel or do something absurd—they are a most silly people, you know—the Greeks would march over here and seize some twenty chiefs, whom they took down to the plain and then shewed them the effect of these explosives on a big rock or something of the kind. It always prevented an insurrection."

"But I don't understand about the Sanni—how did they come here at all?" asked Mavrone.

"They were the original inhabitants of this plateau. When the Charaxi—a nomad people which has quite disappeared;—though, by the way, I have written a tractate on the Charaxian words surviving in the Sanni language; you might perhaps read it; and I

can't help thinking one of the sacred books of the Sanni is in Charaxian."

"How interesting," said Mavrone. "What sort of"

"Go on about the Charaxi," said Baj.

"Well, the Charaxi drove the Greeks up into this mountain, and the Greeks made an alliance with these Sanni; when a battle came on, the Sanni, seeing the Greeks getting the worst of it, turned against them, and helped the Nomads, who seem to have had a most enormous army. Well, the Greeks ensconced themselves in a stronghold in the mountain and fought against both for ever so long. They had been besieged over eighty years when Hegesias and the others were sent to Greece. In the ninetieth year they were so reduced that they could hold out no longer. They staked everything on a forlorn hope. On a certain night the whole population divided into two bands and left the fastness simultaneously, not a man woman or child being left behind. The smaller body went up against the Sanni, while the larger attacked the Charaxian camp on the plain. They fought desperately all night long; and the party on the plain, who had driven the Charaxi before them at the first rush, were now being overcome by superior numbers, when suddenly the Sanni, who had been routed by the smaller body, burst with wild shrieks down the hill. The Charaxi were struck with panic thinking the Sanni had again turned traitors and fled in utter disorder. The Greeks pursued them a little way, then turned back and fell upon the Sanni and cut them to pieces, aided by the other body of Greeks who now came down from the mountain in pursuit. This practically finished the war. The Greeks got possession of the whole plateau, and easily beat off the

Nomads, who retired after a few weeks. As for the Sanni, there was a great dispute among the Greeks whether to exterminate them or make them a nation of slaves. The latter view prevailed, and they were slaves for nearly a century. By that time the Greeks had made a wonderful advance in culture and humanity, and on the motion of a man called Atopos the Philanthropist, liberated them and gave them this side of the plateau to inhabit. Atopos produced statistics showing a moral deterioration in the Sanni during their slavery, and argued that, if they were allowed as independent neighbours, the Greeks might use influence to improve and educate them. This is always the great problem of the Greek Government. They want to improve the minds of the Sanni without destroying their national life by Greek ideas. There have been all kinds of experiments tried upon them, of which I am the last."

"Ah, we wanted to question you about that," said Mavrones. "How did you come here? and how were you made king?"

"It is a long story, and perhaps we had better keep it for to-morrow. However, if you like, and are not sleepy, I will tell you about it now."

"Better now," said Baj; "we are too interested to wait."

"Certainly," said the others, and the Autocrat, after helping himself to another cup of coffee, began his tale.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHEN I was an undergraduate my manners were quiet, but I wore whiskers, which prevented my getting a Fellowship. Well, after trying unsuccessfully first at my own college and then at two others, I became disgusted and went abroad. My first intention was to obtain a professorship at a German University and then edit a philological *Jahrbuch* containing satires on my Oxford friends. As a first step to this end, I went about the Continent examining libraries, and came in course of time to Arganthus, where I found the letter of Hegesias. In the excitement of the moment I made that blot, which I fear has caused you some inconvenience.

"The difficulty was how to get here. Travelling up from India was of course quite out of the question, especially to a person of my habits. The token to be given to the Chinese Emperor was lost, and I expected to be imprisoned for life if I went via Siberia. Finally it struck me that at school I had been called 'Chin Chin,' but I could not remember why. I wrote to an old schoolfellow on the subject, who replied as I had expected, that he always called me 'Chin Chin' because I was supposed to be like a Chinaman. This determined me. I studied Chinese for two years with a German professor; then, suspecting my accent was noticeable, I emigrated to San Francisco and lived for six months in the Chinese quarter. It was very dreary work and I did not care for the Chinese views of life, though, to be sure

I shook off many prejudices there. I had only one friend, a man who had been banished from Chen-si for necromancy, and who knew some capital conjuring tricks. When he absconded, taking all my things—even my spectacles—I found that kind of life no longer tolerable. I was also in monetary difficulties, when the sudden death of my uncle made me a rich man. This enabled me to carry out my long cherished plans. I took a passage to Canton, disguised as a Chinese. When I arrived there I went about the streets talking to everyone I could, to see if I passed muster as a native. Well, it was no use; every single person detected me! This was a cruel blow; but I persevered, hoping at last to palm myself off on somebody; and besides, I felt my knowledge of the language improving daily.

"One day I began a conversation with an old pedlar who immediately said: 'You are a foreigner, are you not?' 'Why?' answered I. 'Where do you suppose I come from?'"

"'It's no use trying to take me in,' said he; 'I know where you come from, from beyond the Great Wall, near Ngan-ting-poo; ch, am I right?'"

"This was an idea. 'Quite right,' I said; 'so I do; but how do you know?'"

"'I'm not a person to be taken in,' said he. 'Besides I had an old pal who came from there, he spoke just like you.'

"'Is he here still?' asked I.

"'No; he never was here. I met him at Chang-Sha three years ago. He was a bad lot, he was . . . went about offering to teach mining, and shewed conjuring tricks.'

"'What became of him?' said I.

"'Ah; he did his conjuring tricks once too often;

the police heard of it, and sent him back where he came from pretty quick.'

" 'Sent him back beyond the Great Wall? Do they often do that to conjurers?'

" 'Well it's mostly miners. They don't like to boil them at Chang-Sha — they're so tender-hearted. If the conjurer is a Chinaman they put him in prison, but if he comes from outside the wall they send him back.'

" My mind was made up.

" 'Where are you going now?' I asked.

" 'Well I just go from town to town about here, selling things.'

" 'Will you take me to Chang Sha as your assistant for 400 dollars? I feel convinced that the person you mentioned was my brother, and must pursue him at all costs.'

" 'Your brother. Why he was over sixty!'

" 'Ah it must have been my Uncle Quang. If he gave you a different name, that was just like him; he delights in an alias. Do you agree?'

" 'I'll do it for 500,' said the pedlar, and the bargain was closed.

" Next morning we started for Chang Sha. I can not imagine what my master thought of me, because though I have great talents, I do not shine as a pedlar. As soon as we reached Chang Sha, I parted from my guide, and going into the most conspicuous part of the chief street began a lecture on mining, diversified by conjuring tricks. A large crowd gathered round me, and I was soon arrested and taken before a judge. After the accusation the judge asked me what I had to say for myself. I said that I came from a country where mining and conjuring were to some extent allowed, and that I was acting under the influence of

stimulants when I gave my lecture. 'Where is this ungodly country?' said the judge. 'Beyond the Great Wall,' I answered, 'not far from the town of Ngan-ting-poo; whatever you do to me, do not send me back there. Rather death than my native land.'

"The judge answered with a stern smile: 'The Social Virtues are a thousand and one in number; therefore a character which possesses them has no need for further qualities. You shall go back to that evil district from which you came. Your actions as well as your face and speech show you are no true child of the Son of the sky: and he who speaks to a magistrate without blushing would throw a stone at his father's brother. You are not worthy to live under a system of universal Suffrage, Extended Local Government, Competitive Examination, National Education by Communal Divisions, and Freedom combined with Endowment for all Religious Sects. Go: but first you must suffer the bastinado.'

"This was unexpected: I protested with some warmth but little effect. I was seized by the guards and beaten on the soles of my feet. I was sorely tempted to announce my real name and country, which would probably have got me off for a time at any rate, though of course it would have ruined my chance of finding the Greeks. Fortunately I fainted before I had made up my mind."

The Autocrat paused for a moment and heaving a sigh refreshed himself with a little coffee.

"It must have been fearful," said Mavrones gently.

"Worse than I could ever have imagined," continued Trench: "for a week I was quite helpless, and after that I couldn't walk. We had to start northwards at once, so they tied me behind a camel and dragged me along till we were well out of the city."

Then I found my old pedlar had bribed them to let me ride the camel for the rest of the journey: if it hadn't been for that bit of kindness I should have died in a couple of days. It was a miserable journey and seemed as if it would never end; but at last we reached the town of Ngan-ting-poo, which is quite close to the Great Wall, in the middle of the large bend made by the Yellow River. 'When we arrived' at that town there was some talk of boiling me after all, but it came to nothing. They did not like to disobey the directions sent with me from Chang Sha, according to which I was to be put beyond the wall and driven away with stones. While in custody I tried to get some information about the Greek settlement, but no one seemed to have any knowledge of it at all. 'I suspected then, and have since found out, that they wilfully deceived me on this point. Well, I was driven out of the Empire with stones, and made my way over the Yellow River to the North West. I had a little money which the guard had not been able to find—only three or four thin gold pieces which I had managed to wedge in between my back teeth. I also found my spectacles and the fragments of a little telescope—quite useless—in the fold of my old dress, which was now given back to me. During the journey I had worn prison clothes. I managed to buy food from the few people I met after crossing the river, till I had travelled for about ten days; but no one could give me any information about the Greeks. Early on the morning of the eleventh day I came across a solitary hut inhabited by a half-breed Chinese-Tartar, who was trying to grow wheat in the desert.' I asked him for food, offering him a gold piece. He understood very little Chinese, but gave me a good breakfast and a reasonable amount of

change. I left the hut and went on with my journey, when, happening by accident to look round, I saw my late host crawling behind a tree with a long knife in his teeth. I felt a little awkward, as I had no weapons with me, and could not well attack him openly. I walked on as if I had seen nothing, inventing plans of defence. Among others, the thought suddenly struck me that my host was between me and the sun, and that if he came up behind, I should see his shadow before he had time to stab. At that very instant I saw the shadow, and turning round kicked the assassin with all my might in the stomach, flooring him at once and knocking the knife out of his hand. I took the knife, and sat upon the man. He appeared quite resigned, expecting me to stab him every moment. I didn't stab him, but kept asking him questions about the Greek settlement. He would not give any answer whatever, and I had no power of coercing him. At last it struck me that I might give him some pain by burning him with the remaining glass of my broken telescope. I took it out and began burning his upper lip, which I believe is the most sensitive part of the body. After a few minutes he began to shriek, so I gave him a little respite, without of course letting his arms free.

" 'Are you a magician?' he asked.

" 'Yes,' I said: 'that is how I knew you were coming up behind me; and that is why I have been banished from China.'

" 'Then why do you ask me about the foreign settlement in the mountain? You must know all about it yourself.'

" I hesitated a moment, then replied:

" 'Ah, there is another magician who has thwarted me. Tell me all you know.'

“‘The foreigners say that if we tell, they will come down and cut us to pieces,’ muttered the man. I began to burn him again : he gave in.

“‘O, do stop that!’ he said : ‘I will take you to some people who are going in the direction you want.’

“I let him get up, and after rubbing his under lip violently, he set off in front of me, and before evening brought me to a nomad camp. He spoke for some time with a chief and left me. The nomads understood practically no Chinese, but were as good-natured as they were dirty. I travelled on with them for several weeks, and at last found myself in sight of the great mountain which overlooks the Greek city. The nomads pointed this out to me and sent me on my way. I went up to the foot of the mountain, and finding no possible way of ascent walked several miles along the plain seeking for an entrance to the plateau.

“I walked for many hours finding always the same straight walls of rock towering above me, till at last I saw a narrow passage running behind a large peaked boulder. I went in, and found a sharp crevice sloping steeply up between the boulder and the main body of rock behind. I climbed up here and found myself on a large ledge with an easily scalable series of gaps and ledges in front of me. In great delight I climbed on and on, till finally I came to a grassy slope near the top, above which rose a smooth, perpendicular crag about a hundred feet high. There was no attempting to climb any further; all my efforts had been wasted. I sat down on the grass and rested almost in despair. I examined the face of the rock again and again, but there was not a ledge, not a single break in the smooth wall, which overhung

slightly at the top. I turned to go down again, and was just preparing to jump to a flat rock underneath, when I thought I heard a voice from the top of the plateau. I waited and listened. It was distinctly the voice of a man singing—apparently singing over his work, for the music only became loud in snatches and occasionally seemed to sink away, as it does at the moment of a strong physical exertion. The sounds were very beautiful, but I could not at first recognise the language. Suddenly it burst upon me as ancient Greek, in a curious pronunciation quite unlike anything I had ever heard.

“I listened attentively and at last caught a few words.

“ ‘ Maidens on happy thrones, who suffered once wearily ;
But grief and heaviness full
At the touch of a grander good.

“I remembered the passage in Pindar: the voice went on with the next strophe :

“ ‘ Still there liveth among the Immortals
She who died in the roar of thunder,
Semele of the delicate hair;
Her Pallas loveth for ever in heaven,
And Zeus the father loveth her well,
And the boy with the ivy crown.’

“I still waited silently. He began the following stanza: ‘Yea, under the sea, so the story tells. . .’ then he stopped and repeated the line, as if trying to recall what followed. A sudden thought struck me and I cried aloud, imitating as far as I could his pronunciation :

“ ‘ Yea, under the sea, so the story tells,
With the watery children of Nereus, a life undying
Is granted Ino, for ever and ever.’

“ ‘ Who is there ? ’ cried the voice in astonishment.

"One from the Hellenes in Europe,' I answered.

"Athena Polias! Where are you?"

"Here under the rock."

"He came to the brink of the cliff, lay down and looked over at me. The first sight of that man was a revelation to me. Dressed in a dark red tunic, lithe, healthy, young and perfectly beautiful, he brought back with a rush all my old fancies of ancient Greece: but what struck me most was a permanent expression, underlying the momentary surprise and curiosity, of an earnest unperplexed happiness, which I had never seen till then on a living face. I felt myself blushing under his eye, at the consciousness of all the weariness, cynicism, sickness, craft, levity, which our whole life and atmosphere print on the countenances of most Europeans. The fact had never struck my consciousness till then. Add to this that I was very tired and dusty, with spectacles on my nose, and clothed in a ridiculous Chinese dress.

"Are you an Hellen?" said the stranger.

"I stammered out an answer:

"Well, roughly speaking—not quite. I am not a Chinaman, though. I am an Englishman—a European. I come from Hellas."

"How did you get here?"

"I came through China—but it is a long story. Can you tell me how to get up?"

"No foreigners are allowed in our country. . . . Still as you come from Hellas, perhaps you may be admitted. Stay where you are, and I will ask the Magistrates."

"Thanks. . . . Try to persuade them. I have gone through all kinds of dangers to get here, and will certainly die before getting home if you send me away."

"I will try. . . But you look tired : take my lunch and refresh yourself while I go back to the city. I have been ploughing here, so I brought a little food with me.'

"He threw me down some dates and brown bread, and three or four large fruits like peaches, but with more flavour, and went off to inform the authorities of my arrival. I sat down again upon the grassy slope and applied myself to the fruit and bread, pondering how to tell my story in case I was admitted to the city. I dared not think of the other alternative—2,000 miles of travel on foot through the desert and then through China before I could reach the sea. The misery of my journey, the months of preparation in San Francisco and all the rest of it, came into my mind. If they only knew, I thought, they *must* take me in.

"In half an hour my friend returned.

" 'It is all well,' he said, 'you are to come up and present yourself to the Elders. I have brought a rope.'

" 'Thank God, thank God,' I answered ; 'how quick you have been ! Is the city far ?'

" 'About twenty furlongs. I ran there and returned on horseback not to keep you waiting. My interview with the Magistrates took some time.'

"I reflected how long it would have taken with us in England and was amazed.

" 'It was very kind of you to make such haste,' I said. 'May I ask your name : mine is Algernon Trench.'

"He made an attempt to pronounce it—'Ah,' he said, 'that is like the Chinese names ; they don't come easily to our lips. I am called Euangelos the son of Peirates. . . Now will you climb up ?' He had fastened the rope to something at the top, and let the other end

down to me. This was a new difficulty: I could climb a rope, when I was at school, about as well as most boys, but had never tried to do so since. However, I caught hold, and with a tremendous strain pulled myself up about forty feet—not half the height of the cliff. I couldn't get a foot higher, strive as I might. "It's no use," I said; and slipped down again covered with humiliation. The athletic powers of this youth leaning over the cliff were so immeasurably superior to mine that he could hardly understand my failure.

"'Can you not climb ropes?' he asked politely: 'I ought to have remembered that foreigners so seldom climb' (Foreigners to him meant Chinese.) 'I will think of some other plan.'

"At this moment a number of other Greeks of all ages, both men and women, arrived to see what I was like. They looked over the cliff at me, and gave me welcome by smiles and kindly greetings. For a moment the old feeling of shame came over me at the sight of these people so superior to all I had ever seen, in beauty and health; but their kindness put me at my ease, and I returned the greetings. My first acquaintance, Euangelos, who had been talking to some of the others, now leant his head over and said: 'Make a loop in the rope for your feet, and we will pull you up.' I did so, and was soon rising through the air till I reached the edge of the plateau. That was my first view of the plain and the city and the Hellenes moving round me. I won't describe it, because you will soon see it yourself: but I think that was the most precious moment in my life.

"'Get up on the horse,' said Euangelos; 'we will run on with you and show you the way.'

"He put his hand on the bridle, and ran on easily by my side though I was cantering smartly. When

we came to the city, he took me to the Prytaneion, where the Elders were waiting, and left me alone with them. They began by asking me if I was tired or hungry; and on my saying no, proceeded to question me about my motive in coming, how I had got through China, and what I knew of the Greeks in Europe. Finally they said I must state my case before the Assembly, though personally they were disposed to let me stay and become a Greek citizen. When I objected that I could not pronounce ancient Greek in a way to be intelligible to a large audience, they suggested that I should write my speech and get some one else, Euangelos for instance, to deliver it. Meantime one of them proposed—and I have always felt grateful to him since—that if I would come home with him, I could have a bath.

“Well, to make my story short, I wrote the speech and Euangelos delivered it, and the Assembly agreed by a fair majority that I should stop. I was then granted a house and a piece of ground, which I was supposed to till and cultivate with my own hands, but which, on the proof of my absolute incompetency for agricultural labour, was commuted for a fixed supply of provisions. My chief duty was to give public lectures, which I did as soon as I had roughly mastered the pronunciation. I always used Classical Greek, which they understood easily, and in which of course I felt more equal to my audience. I had a good many subjects of which the Hellenes were ignorant—practically all Ancient and Modern history, as we learn it: for of course they knew no history when they were taken into captivity by the Persians: then Greek Latin and English literature with the little I knew of French Italian and German: then the development of philosophy, and of course the European languages.

They questioned me a little about Science, but knew so much more than I did, that I had nothing to say. What I had to learn from them, you will soon find out. Their philosophy and literature and art open a new world to you—almost as much as their political and social life does.

“Well, time went on, and I continued lecturing to large audiences: but what stung me was the obvious superiority of my pupils to their master, not only in knowledge and culture, but in character altogether. The thought preyed upon me, that after all I was probably the worst and most selfish man in the city. I was a much better man then than I am now; but the Hellenes seemed a race superior in kind. I spoke once to Orthodikos—the old senator who had given me the bath, and who was always a great friend to me—about this, and told him it made me miserable. He tried to console me; but from what he said, I gathered that some of the Elders thought me a bad person to have influence over the young, and wished me to cease from lecturing. It may not have been the case: but that is what I thought, and I applied for leave to bring my lectures to a close: which was granted, at once. I even thought of trying to get a passport to take me through China to the coast, and so getting home again: but after what I had seen of these people, it seemed a sin to go back to Europe. I stayed on, and devoted myself entirely to Metaphysics and the philosophical aspect of Sannian.

“At last a change came. When I had been in the City more than two years there was a great outbreak of the Sanni, who were then divided into thirteen small tribes with independent chiefs. One of these chiefs, a man called Zomkō, tried to get chosen general of all the Sanni, with a view to driving out the Greeks

and taking possession of the whole table-land. His supremacy was generally accepted ; but two or three tribes rebelled and he had to quell them before marching against the City. There was a kind of civil war, when the Greeks interfered, routed Zomko's army and took him prisoner with most of his captains. This put an end to open fighting, but the country was still full of sedition and turbulence, especially because one of the captive chiefs managed to send a secret message to his people telling of visions and dreams that had come to him, prophesying the approach of one of the two Sannian gods. It was generally supposed that this would be Klastanri the god of war ; and that he would carry out Zomko's policy and reduce the Greeks to slavery. Well, the problem then was, how to keep the Sanni quiet without exterminating them : there were long debates in the Assembly for several days without any very brilliant plans turning up. At last an old professor of history came forward, and said that he had always thought the Sanni were just at that state of culture, when a kind of theocracy or a race of divinely descended kings formed the most effective government. He suggested that some promising young Greek should be sent to represent one of the two gods. The proposition was received with laughter : but the old man persisted in his arguments. There was no real need to represent Klastanri, who would of course have to make war on the Greeks and drive them out : it would be much better to assume the character of Mooshow, the hero presiding over cunning, mirth, torture, and the arts of peace. The great difficulty was that a Greek would be certainly recognized by the Sanni, and would consequently be hated and overthrown : it would be almost impossible for him to make them believe in his

divine mission: and besides, the high culture of the Greeks would seem unintelligible and repulsive to savages. The plan was therefore almost dropped, when one of my pupils came forward: "Why not send Algernon the son of Trench?" said he. "He is quite uplike either the Greeks or the Sanni, and will seem to belong to another species: he would represent the Sannian god Mooshow excellently, and his manners will suit the barbarians." The proposal was received with acclamation, and everything depended on my consent, which I somewhat reluctantly gave. After that it was all a matter of detail.

"The rumour of the projected appearance of the hero Klastanri was allowed to spread, because it was thought there would be no difficulty in making the Sanni at the last moment believe that Mooshow might very well turn up in his place. The prophecies of the imprisoned chief had to be slightly falsified: but as very few copies were extant, that was an easy business. I did most of it myself: the works have since been accepted as canonical. I ought to mention that the Sanni have no proper religion, though they are brimful of superstitions: they worship only these two heroes, one of peace, the other of war, who are at mortal enmity to one another. There are festivals once in every four years. The festival to Klastanri in the Summer—a reference, I suppose, to the 'time when Kings go forth to war'—and that to Mooshow in the Autumn of the same year. One festival-year occurred just before the outbreak under Zomko, who was something of a devotee. He flayed alive twelve of his relatives at the feast of Klastanri and sent the skins round to the twelve other tribes, as a hint that he wished to assert himself. The chiefs used to burn children alive and run a-muck, so to speak, with swords

and hatchets, mostly among the women and the poorer people : but of course the Greeks put that down. One of the great features of this feast was the practice of insulting and desecrating Mooshow's temple, as a compliment to his rival. At my feast—that is, at Mooshow's—all this was reversed : they used to poison and scourge to death a few people, mostly children, and they had a great carouse at which everybody ridiculed everybody else, and finally all went in a body to mock and insult Klastanri.

“ Well, not to wander any further, it was agreed that I should personate Mooshow, and gradually inaugurate a better view of peace than was represented by torture and buffoonery. I was taken to an old chief, an associate of Zomko, who was kept in prison by the Greeks, and tried to perfect myself in the Sanni pronunciation. I had to have a slight operation on the tongue before I could get their second guttural N accurately. I also worked up the religious literature thoroughly, though I knew it pretty well before. The language is rather odd : the vocabulary is chiefly Mongolian, as far as roots go, but the accidence and syntax are entirely worked over by Greek influence. The Greek philologists say there is an ‘irreducible residuum’ of words which are not at all like any Mongolian dialect, and conclude that the Sanni are a remnant of the pre-Mongol aborigines, who must have been driven out or exterminated by the Tartars. The utterly savage customs of my beloved people point in the same way. Well, I went on learning the language religion and manners of this old chief, when a deputation of Sanni came to the city, boldly asking the Greeks to build them a palace for Klastanri, who was soon expected to appear. The Greeks rather astonished them by consenting at once, and sent off architects and masons

to build this palace in which we are sitting. Well, the summer came and the Sannians were full of excitement. The Greeks left them entirely free, not wishing to provoke a rising; they did not even keep guard over the sacrifices to prevent human bloodshed. Everything was in Klastanri's favour, but he failed to come up to the mark. The rebellion was ready and the feast was held with unusual rejoicing, but no deliverer appeared. The people fell into a state of utter depression and Klastanri's prestige dropped. Then a rumour arose, and the Greeks fostered it, that after all it was not Klastanri who was to come, but Mooshow. The people caught eagerly at this idea. Well, the feast of Mooshow came round at last: the date is fixed by the ripening of the grapes on Mooshow's sacred vine. There had been heavy storms and the sky was still black with clouds. I was taken by night secretly across the boundary into the Sanni country and placed in the recesses of the Temple. There are no watches there: no one dares to go near the shrine after sundown. I was clothed in the red and gold robe you saw me wearing this afternoon, and carried an enormous scourge, which I have since changed for a smaller. I waited in the Temple alone till morning, when a little band of worshippers appeared: as soon as they entered the temple, I stood forth and addressed them in a speech I had composed and learned by heart some days before. I felt nervous on the score of accent; but I had hardly begun, when they fell down and grovelled on the earth before me, upon which, more or less, against my will, I gave them a few stripes with the scourge. . . It was certainly necessary in order to carry out the imposture. . . You can imagine the rest: the whole population came out and one and all prostrated themselves, escorted me to the other temple

where we all spat upon the image of Klastanri ; and finally led me to the Palace. Here a difficulty occurred. The façade had of course been made to suit the palace of Klastanri, and represented him in the full carnage of battle, massacring enemies by the score : that was in the middle ; a burning town and a pyramid of skulls in the two corners. I insisted on having this façade instantly pulled down, and laid about me with the scourge meantime as gently as I could without losing my character. When the sculpture was completely destroyed I entered in state, and held a great reception in the palace, insisting on the homage of all the chiefs. I encountered no opposition, as Zomko had quite crushed the power of his enemies, and all his chief adherents were either dead or in prison. I also noticed with interest that Zomko's movement had familiarized the people with the idea of a central government.

“ After this I have nothing particular to tell, except one adventure ; four years after my arrival, the sacred year again came round, and of course there was a good deal of danger in my position during the feast of Klastanri. As the custom was to desecrate my shrine and spit upon my image, I felt that at any moment a gang of devotees might break open the Palace and murder me, especially as there was—and is still—an undercurrent of ill feeling because I don't make war upon the Greeks. As a first precaution I did all that was possible to destroy the worship of Klastanri. I managed to get a promise from the Chiefs that they would use no human victims. I even hoped at one time to put down the festival altogether. But as the day drew near—it is marked by the full bloom of a red and black lily in Klastanri's precinct—the excitement of the people became so intense that I was

alarmed. Parties of men went armed about the country, slaughtering all the animals they saw and shrieking in praise of my enemy, till one night they actually surrounded the Palace and clamoured for me. Feeling that I was powerless, I fled on the eve of the Feast to the Greek city, and left the worshippers of Klastanri to do as they would, only bidding my steward proclaim that if any human sacrifice or any torture took place, I would avenge it tenfold."

Trench paused, and rather a resentful expression came across his face.

"The Greeks accused me of flying from my post," he continued abruptly, "and after a fortnight sent me back with orders not to leave the Palace again on any pretence, but in case of need to send for assistance.

"I don't see what else you could have done," remarked Mavrones, as the Autocrat hesitated again.

"You don't understand the circumstances: I was probably wrong," returned Trench sharply. Then, to cover his hastiness, he added:

"It is curious how these movements die out. That was only four years ago. I don't suppose they like me any better now than then; though I was rather popular when I returned because I had a lot of public executions. They've got more accustomed to the idea of a theocracy too: they're not nearly so much afraid of me as they used to be.—But however, there'll be another Klastanri feast in a fortnight, and as yet there is not the slightest sign of excitement about it. Of course I shall have to keep a sharp look out all the same."

So Trench ended, and the party sat for a few moments in silence, which was only broken by an aggressive snore from Wibbling.

Many thanks for your story," said Baj: "it is even more extraordinary than I expected. Of course we will do what we can to support you at Klastanri's feast."

"Thanks. I fancy the people will keep quiet enough, though it is too early yet to determine with certainty."

There was another pause, while the Autocrat lay back in his chair, and kicked a big lump of red coal in the fireplace. A crackling burst of flame lit up the rich blue hangings of the room, and threw a temporary glamour over Wibbling's oatmeal check.

"But why do you write on slates?" Mavrone asked.

"Well, I am thought to be writing a new sacred book, and as all the old scriptures—what there is of them—are engraved on slate, I felt bound to make mine like them. I dictate in English and make the scribes write down what I say phonetically; I have taught them the alphabet and nothing more."

"Do they like having their sacred writings in a foreign language?"

"Yes: they cannot understand any of their old books; they are written in the original language which the Sanni spoke before the Mongolian influence. The prophecies about me are only recent additions."

"Wibbling, wake up," said Baj, "or else go to bed!"

"I *am* awake!" answered Wibbling. "I'm not a bit tired, but couldn't go to sleep because Mavrone snored so."

CHAPTER IX.

THE terrible wind that sweeps the "Land of Grass," as the Tartars call their wilderness, driving in clouds whatever is lying upon the ground, be it sand or stones or snow, to tear up tents and bury encampments, as of old it has buried cities, was not felt on the plateau where the Greeks and the Sanni had their dwelling. The mountain ridges, rising higher at the edge of the table land, bore the force of the wind and sheltered the territory within, which sloped and undulated from one range to the other as much like a vast valley as a plain. Those enormous rocks which the Mongol horseman saw rising out of the desert, were bleak and herbless, beaten and made black by storms, with no relief, neither summer nor winter, from the jagged nakedness in which they had first been flung into the upper air by volcanic fires underneath. For miles round the mountains the desert in every direction was absolutely barren, a waste of sand and low rocks unrelieved by a single bush or weed, not even a "Land of Grass." Consequently the Hellenes had little intercourse with the Tartars, who found no pasture near and seldom approached the mountain except for the sake of commerce, more often conducting Chinese and Thibetan merchants than trading on their own account. No strangers were admitted to the land above, for the Greeks always came down to the plain to traffic; and none had any knowledge, save by tradition, of the real nature of the table-land within.

There were many climates there ; from the high mountain slopes where only stunted pines stood, and a little white flower the Greeks called *cynomallion* hid itself in crannies amid the snow, to the warm valleys full of sunlight where oranges and bananas and many fruits strange to English mouths grew luxuriantly in an almost tropical air. This was the work of the same fires which had heaved up the mountain long ago, and which now found vent in the boiling columns of the lake. The whole soil of the plateau was warmed from beneath.

The king's palace of the Sanni stood on high ground, on the first stretch of level country after crossing the eastern ridges. The nights were cool, and the mornings beautiful with that vivid clear-cut brightness, which comes in a dry atmosphere where dark and craggy mountains stand sharply against a cloudless sky.

Baj and Wibbling had gone for a walk as soon as breakfast was over, leaving the maimed Mavrones lying upon the sofa in the Autocrat's study, and enjoying with intense interest a book of old exile-songs, preserved by the Greeks from the time of their captivity. Before he had read a third of the volume, a knock came at the door ; and Mavrones, feeling himself entirely without data to fix the probable language of the person knocking, called in English, "Come in."

A man appeared, clothed in a dark blue tunic, and grey cloak ; an old man with white hair and a staff, but straight and firm and clear-eyed ; and, as Mavrones felt at the first glance, with the same look of undoubting serenity and calm which had struck Trench on the countenance of the young Euangelos. He spoke in a deep kindly voice a few words which

Mavroneſ did not underſtand. As he repeated the ſentence Mavroneſ caught the drift of it : it was Ancient Greek with the pronunciation of the modern language ſpoken in the ſettlement.

"I am Ariphron, the phyſician ; Algernon ſent for me yeſterday to ſee to a ſtranger who had hurt his ankle."

Mavroneſ answered in the ſame language with a makeshift pronunciation :

"Greeting, father. I am the ſtranger with the ſprained ankle ; my name is Mavroneſ, ſon of Mavroneſ."

"From what country ?" asked Ariphron. "You have almoſt the look of a Hellen, and you ſpeak the ancient language eaſily."

"I am a Hellen, from Europe, 'come home from home,' as the poet ſays.

"The two homes are far apart," ſaid Ariphron with a ſmile. "Let me ſee your ankle. How did you come ?"

"I ſaw the letter of your envoy Hegesias," began Mavroneſ.

"You too ! Poor Hegesias has more to hear him now than in his lifetime. But I beg your pardon——"

Then Mavroneſ told the ſtory as we know it, while Ariphron, with the aſſiſtance of a Sannian ſervant whom he had called, bathed and bandaged up the ſwollen ankle.

"You are badly diſlocated," he ſaid ; "you will not be able to walk for many hours."

"Many hours ! I expected to be laid up for a month."

"Perhaps your phyſicians are leſs wiſe than ours ? We are much better than the Chineſe."

"You have not pushed the bone back to its place : I should like to get that over as soon as possible."

"For I have put on a lotion to prepare it," answered Ariphron elliptically. "It will be ready in half an hour : there will not be any pain."

"No pain ! your treatment must be very different from our doctors."

"Are your doctors supported by the State, or does each man choose a doctor to pay as long as he is well, like the Chinese ?"

"What ?" said Mavrones. "Oh, well, neither. They are paid so much a visit when a man is ill. As long as their patient is well, they are not paid."

"What an odd plan ! Does it answer ?"

"I suppose it has two bad effects. People don't have a doctor till they are seriously ill : and then the doctor sometimes will not let them get well again. But how do you manage ?"

"Ours are supported by the State : there is an examination in medicine, and those who are thought worthy to become doctors are fed in the Temple of Asclepios and clothed at the public cost, some to heal the sick, some to gain more knowledge and to teach."

The slight constraint of talking Greek was making itself felt by Mavrones, and influencing his conversation.

"But being thus fed," he asked, "do they not grow idle and neglect their craft ?"

"No : for that would be dishonest. And if a man is deemed dishonest, good men do not speak to him nor let him buy or sell with them : so, unless they repent, they are brought to great misery."

"What a good plan : is the punishment only applied to dishonesty ?"

"No. Any person who made himself much hated, by his neighbours would be treated in the same way."

"But the successful doctors, do they not get more money than the unskilful?"

"More honour, but not more money. They have crowns given them, or their names inscribed on a pillar, and the very best have statues."

Mavrones thought for a moment.

"We have an examination," he said, "but it is so easy that almost anyone who wishes can pass, so there are many ignorant doctors. And others get practices without even passing that examination, by advertising themselves."

"What is that—advertising?"

"Well, those who wish to become known, put long notices in the daily papers, praising themselves and that they wish to sell."

"Praising each man himself, or one another?" asked Aripbron idiomatically.

"Each himself, and often repeating the same words fifty times over. For instance, a man who discovers a new medicine or soap, will publish every day for many years, say, twenty notices in as many newspapers, all in the same words, praising himself, not like a man but like a god, beyond bounds."

"Wonderful! But do other people, knowing that it is only himself praising himself, still believe him?"

"I don't suppose they actually believe him; but their ears and minds are so drilled through with the praise of him, which they see every day and never, examine, that they buy his wares and act as if they believed."

"For the many are not wise," observed Aripbron, "nor the few neither."

"Another plan is to put up on walls or wooden hoardings enormous pictures in bright colours showing the virtues of whatever you want to sell, so that there is not a corner left uncovered—on railway stations especially."

"That must be beautiful; though expensive, if the pictures are by good artists."

"No; it is not beautiful: they are done by bad artists, and it is only by the number of them that they become expensive. In fact, they are so common and ugly that we do not read them, unless one particularly brilliant or hideous catches the eye. There is one that haunts me still, so amazingly foul it is to look at, which has been all over our chief cities for some years—a woman putting on a wash to make her hair grow."

"And this wash, which the ill-favoured woman uses, does it really make the hair grow?"

"It professes to: but there are many rich and wise persons who have lost their hair; and not, I imagine, willingly."

"You tell strange things," said Ariphron; "you do not read these advertisements, and you do not believe them, and they cover every corner, and are all ugly! I wonder I never heard about it before.—You see, being an old man, I did not attend Algernon's lectures, and no doubt I am ignorant of many things younger men have learnt from him. Railways of course I understand,—we used them once—but what are newspapers?"

"They are large sheets of paper covered partly by advertisements and partly by news from home and abroad, debates in Parliament, trials at police courts, murders, robberies, and so on, and generally a few short treatises on interesting topics, mostly political."

"Why are there two newspapers? I should have thought one was enough. One for the Oligarchs and one for the Demos I suppose."

"Oh, there are hundreds for the Oligarchs and hundreds more for the Demos! Most of them come out every day, but some weekly, fortnightly, monthly and so on."

"But is there something worthy of note happening every day?"

"Not always. Then they write about books and strange animals, and curious accidents and the weather. But of course there are always the crimes and robberies."

"Not every day?"

"Oh, yes. It is difficult to tell the number exactly, but I should say at a guess there must be half-a-dozen serious crimes in our chief town every day, and about five houses burnt."

"Apollon Apotropaïos! What a den of malefactors!"

"Well, you see, there are excuses. These crimes are mostly committed by the very poor, who cannot earn a livelihood by honesty; and then by far the greater portion of them are due to drunkenness."

"But how can men so poor as that find money to buy strong drink?"

"It is almost the first thing they buy. For one thing, drunkenness is a sort of disease which makes a man constantly want to drink more: and again, a man who spends money on drink gets all his money's worth himself, instead of spending it on his family."

"But I do not understand how drinking too much can cause crime? A good man when drunk, though foolish and shameful to look at, is not at once made wicked."

"You cannot understand it until you see it. But statistics shew that the greater part of the crime and distress and madness in my country are all due to drink."

"Then do your rulers do anything to prevent the people from being ruined by drunkenness?"

"Not the rulers, but private persons have formed societies where all the members promise to abstain from wine themselves and to induce others to do the same."

"Do sober men, who have no need of such a vow for themselves, form these societies?"

"Yes: if they did not, it would be a disgrace to belong to such a society, and men in real need could not be induced to join."

"Of course, I see. And having themselves given up wine they can more easily persuade others. And do many people take this vow?"

"Among the poorer people very many. But they are rather despised by the rich and the highly educated."

"You come from an awful country and did well to leave it. I wonder a good man can live there: do not the wise kill themselves?"

"It is customary among us to say that anyone who kills himself is mad and not wise. But there are not very many suicides except in winter."

"What is 'not very many'?"

"Well, I was told by one who said he knew, that out of all those at present alive in my country about three thousand would die by their own hands. My father once questioned an old beggar, who sat under the arches of London Bridge, about the suicides; and he said he used to bring friends to sit with him on Christmas Eve—that is one of our great feasts—in the

cold weather—to see them jumping off the Bridge, mostly young girls.”

“O Earth and the gods!” cried Aripbron; “but is this place made more convenient or more beautiful than others, that so many drown themselves there?”

“No—I suppose it is, or was then, much the same thing at most of the bridges. At that time of the year the city is generally filled with so thick a smoke and fog that men can scarcely see: and even if they could, there is nothing but backs of houses about, as ugly as bricks and soot and mortar can make them, with a foul stream and an oily underneath, where they drown.”

“Is this town often in darkness?”

“Very often, except in summer, at which season the richer inhabitants leave it.”

“Having endured the fogs, they fly from the fine weather? Yours is a strange country. I wonder too that you hold it a disgrace for a man to kill himself. The Chinese are wiser, who, being too many in the land and therefore starving, give praise to suicides.”

“We are indeed too many in the land—I speak of England, where I have chiefly-lived, not of Hellas—but we regard suicide as a crime.”

“It is odd. We have laws to encourage it, and have had from time immemorial.”

“I remember there were such laws of old in Hellas—but I do not see why you wish your people to kill themselves?”

“Nay, my friend. The lawgiver saw that some men are so greatly afflicted that it is an evil thing for them to live; but yet, through an instinct which is not rational but merely animal, they love their life beyond measure: therefore he made it easy for them to die, that as few as possible may live in misery.”

For he knew that man is only too full of hope, and no one would seek death unless his life were passing sorrowful."

Mavrone was silent for a minute before replying ; then he asked :

"What arrangement do you make for the people who wish to kill themselves?"

"There is an officer to whom anyone who does not wish to live may come in the morning and state wherein he blames his life : then, eight days after, if he is of the same mind, he comes again and is given a potion which kills him without pain. If he has children or a wife, the state takes care of them."

"That is quite like the old law in Anticyra. Do many avail themselves of it?"

"No one for the last thirty or forty years. Then there was one case, and before that none for more than a century."

"What was the one case?"

"Rather a sad one—a certain Exarchos, who originated altogether the science of measuring degrees of consciousness. He spent all the first part of his life studying it, and seems to have ruined his health. Well, when his great book appeared, everybody read it, and the science grew with extraordinary quickness ; so that in about five years Exarchos was quite superseded and all his results corrected. By the end of ten years he brought out another book on the same subject, but all his discoveries were old and his views out of date, and his ten years' work judged to be worthless. And this so cut him to the heart that he could not bear to live and grow more and more despised every day."

"That is an inevitable evil but very sad . . . By the way what Government have you? Not a king I suppose?"

"No, we never had ; while our people were wandering, of course, all questions were decided by a Council of war . . . After we were safely settled here and the Charaxi left us in peace, this Council changed imperceptibly into a Council of Elders, which still rules the city in ordinary times. A general assembly of the people is held in cases of great need."

"How are the elders appointed ?"

"Appointed? Well, there is no special method. They consult any one who seems to them wise, so there is always about the same number of councillors."

"But have you no regular election ?"

"No, why should we? No one supposes the councillors will choose unjustly or be less wise than he. And then there is seldom any great need. We mix little with foreigners, and no power dare attack us. You, I suppose, have many wars ?"

"The Hellenes in Europe have one great enemy ; but they have shrunk to a small people, and the great powers do not suffer them to fight for their territory. In England we spend most of our time talking about a neighbouring island, which wishes to make its own laws and will not obey ours."

"That is like the Sanni."

"Not quite like the Sanni, for they are practically as civilized as ourselves, and in their own country commit much fewer crimes ; but they are ill-educated and ill-fed, and have been oppressed for many centuries both by the English and by the Oligarchs. So they are always rebelling against us, and sometimes murder the rulers we send over to them."

"But why do you not crush the rebellion or else satisfy the islanders ?"

"We have tried for many hundred years to put

down the ill-feeling by force and by severe laws, but have never succeeded."

"And can you not grant their wishes and make them content?"

"No, it is considered wicked in England to suggest such a thing. However, my friends would very likely give you a different account. It is a question on which even brothers and friends differ and feel bitterly against one another."

"But you were going to tell me about your wars?"

"Oh, yes: England having few soldiers only fights weak and savage tribes. The other countries spend nearly all they have on their armies, and will all be ruined by a lengthy peace."

"Ruined by peace! Then why do they not disband their armies?"

"They are afraid of each other, and so far from disbanding spend more and more upon their soldiers every year."

"But this cannot go on for ever!"

"No. It only wants some slight outbreak to start a war which will be the bloodiest ever known in Europe and destroy men by hundreds of thousands. Or else possibly there may be revolutions from within, which will upset the system of great armies."

"How do you mean?"

"Some of the strongest nations are eaten away by conspiracies, secret or open, for the destruction of those who rule. And in the largest nation of all, which is not free, but ruled by despots, there are thousands of men and women, mostly educated and some powerful, whose lives are devoted to the destruction of all who rule them and all that their country honours. They have killed the last despot and are trying to kill his son."

"But why are these people not suppressed or put to death?"

"All possible things are done to put them down: they are shot and hung and tortured, and many are shut all their lives in dungeons, where they sicken with diseases, and rats eat them under the level of the river; and others are exiled to a fearful country north of this, very cold and desert."

"Yet they cease not to conspire?"

"No. It all comes of the suffering of the poorest people, which makes them full of hatred and bitterness. For though in some countries many of the rich, and even the oligarchs, work greatly to aid them, there is more misery underneath than they can possibly touch."

Mavrones stopped, not quite knowing how to tell the old Hellen of the facts without exaggerating them. Aripbron smiled sadly and answered:

"I was once sent on an embassy to China, and there I saw crowds of people grubbing for food in the ditches and the streets. They seemed to be starving and were clothed in rags. A Mandarin told me that they were all thieves and wicked men, who were justly punished for their sins by a life of misery. I thought he must be a liar, for there could not be such a number of wicked men, and no one could be so wicked as to deserve such suffering. Besides, I knew there were more people in the country than could live there. The Emperor gave the envoys great gifts when we departed; so we all went out at night, secretly, lest the Emperor hearing should be annoyed, and gave them away to the most miserable men and women we could find in Peking; many of them said they had friends even more wretched than they, so to them we gave double or treble, bidding them divide it with

their friends. Yet we were sorry afterwards that we had given all our presents away in Peking, we saw so many starving in other places."

Alas for Ricardo and the evils of indiscriminate charity! Mavrones smiled slightly and replied:

"We scarcely saw anything in China, except for a day at Peking. The escort took us as much as possible out of the way of towns, and we were not allowed to speak to anyone. But I have heard the suffering of the people there is even worse than the worst in Europe."

"It is said that they are too many for the country to feed; yet I wonder if there be not evil in them that rule."

"Do you have no difficulty about over-population?"

"None—our numbers have been the same for a hundred years."

Mavrones would have enquired further, but at this moment Baj and Wibbling entered the room, and showed the signs of fear usual in a stranger's presence—or rather Baj did so; for Wibbling only put his hands into his pockets and stared.

Mavrones effected an introduction, and the four conversed together for a few minutes. The pronunciation difficulty of course returned, and Wibbling, who, like most of his betters, knew little Greek, after two or three pointed personal questions in vile grammar and an English pronunciation, questions which, to the immense relief of Mavrones and Baj, Ariphron did not understand, retired sullenly to a corner, and began to whistle. Presently the old physician returned to his duty. "It is time now to put your ankle into joint again," he said, and stooped to undo the bandage.

"Would you like any assistance?" said Baj.

"No, thank you. It will go quite easily;" and suit-
ing action to word, he pushed back the bone into its
place without any effort and without causing the
least pain.

"What a beautiful piece of work," said Baj:
"with us a bone is put back with a violent wrench
which hurts cruelly. How do you manage it?"

"The lotion on the bandage relaxed and lengthened
the sinews, so there is no difficulty in moving the bone.
You could dislocate it again without hurt. Now I put
on a lotion which will take much longer to work, but
will eventually tighten up your joint to its proper
state. Both preparations were discovered about
twenty years ago by a great physician, Timarcte,
daughter of Euboulos."

"Do you pay great attention to Medicine?"

"Not for ourselves—there is little work for physi-
cians in the city except in the way of accidents. But
we study the subject for its own interest, and besides
of late years we try to help the Tartars."

"You do not admit the Tartars into the city, do
you?"

"No: we go down to the desert to see them. The
worst of the Tartars is that they come galloping up
to the foot of the mountain and ask for a drug to cure
some one who is lying very ill a hundred miles away.
When we explain that we cannot treat a person without
knowing what is the matter with him, they only offer
us large presents, and do not think of believing what
we say. It all came, I believe, from a hasty con-
clusion drawn by a young friend of mine. A Tartar
came to him saying that his brother was dying in the
encampment twenty miles off, and begging for a
remedy. On enquiry it turned out that the brother

had been taken ill on the sixteenth day of the eighth month, the day after the Feast of the Moon-Bread. My friend at once suspected over-eating and sent medicines accordingly. The experiment was perfectly successful; but the consequence is that we are now supposed to cure any sick person without the least knowledge of the disease."

"I suppose they are badly off for doctors—the Mongols."

"They have the Lamas, who, thinking sickness a devil, exorcise it with rites and prayers. They give medicine also; but if they do not happen to have a particular drug with them, they write the name of it on a piece of paper, roll it up into a pill, and administer that instead. Yet some of them are moderately good doctors, and rather less dishonest than the Chinese."

"I suppose you make rather a good thing out of the Tartars?" shouted Wibbling from the corner.

"We do not take money or presents. We make the patient, and if possible his family, promise not to skin wolves alive any more nor torture them; and we have practically abolished the old punishment for robbers, who used to be starved to death publicly in an iron cage."

"How horrible; but do the Tartars skin wolves alive?"

"Yes: they look on wolves as personal enemies, and hunt them greatly: when caught, they tie them up to a tent peg to mock and torture, at last flaying them alive."

"What's the harm?" said Wibbling: "we skin eels alive."

Let us apologise for Wibbling: he was suffering from fancied neglect, and felt he was not taking that

part in the conversation and the attention of the old Greek, to which his merits entitled him: besides, he was bilious, and Baj had occasionally snubbed him during their walk. Consequently he said "more things and wickeder," than even he would have approved, in his better moments.

"O man," cried Ariphron, greatly shocked, "do not speak thus! Surely men do not skin beasts alive in your country?" he asked, speaking to Mavrones.

"I am afraid it is true," said he. "The same is done to some birds, and so I have heard, to seals."

"Oh Artemis! is it from hatred of these animals?"

"No—eels are skinned as lobsters are boiled alive, just because they do not die quick enough. Living birds are flayed that women may wear them on their heads—it is said the colours are brighter so."

"But are not these things punished by the laws?"

"I believe not—at all events the law does not act."

"Why, it's no worse than "*pâté de foie gras*," broke in Wibbling in English. "We keep geese in hot rooms, with their feet nailed to the floor so that they can't move, till they die of liver disease, and then we eat their livers. Translate that, Baj, and tell him it's what I say."

Baj looked thoughtfully at the speaker but said nothing.

Ariphron had covered his face with his hands. "I fear we have given you a terrible picture of our country," said Mavrones: "it has its good side as well."

Wibbling, finding his interpreter recalcitrant, braced himself for an effort in Greek: adapting his literary form to certain well known models, he marked:

"If you have vivisection, you know science;—or rather, if you know science, you have vivisection (*Zootomia*)—which is much worse: so *you* needn't talk," he added in English.

"What does your friend mean?" asked Ariphron politely. "What is vivisection?"

Baj replied: "Our doctors, when an idea occurs to them which they wish to verify, experiment upon a living animal to see the effect. For instance, finding a substance they think poisonous, they give it to an animal to see if it will kill him: or, if one invents a new bandage, he will break several rabbits' legs to see how it answers. They also cut open living animals before their pupils to instruct the young."

The look of horror on the Greek's face made the speaker pause. "It is very terrible no doubt; but physicians say—at least most physicians say—they discover great things thereby, and heal many human sicknesses: though certainly some deny it, saying no new thing has been found this way; and then, the experiments are always—or generally—performed under anæsthetics, at least in England."

"Elsewhere not?"

"In the other great countries of Europe they do not generally use anæsthetics. Sometimes the experiments depend on the amount of pain caused; for instance, the operator may wish to know how much an animal can stand, or by what means the greatest pain can be inflicted; then of course they could not use anæsthetics. But in most countries the physicians prefer to use a drug called *curare*, which keeps the animal motionless while increasing his pain."

"Increasing it? How do you mean?"

"I do not understand the working of it. Some people deny that it increases pain: though one great French-

man, who used it, says that his animals 'probably suffered agonies beyond anything the imagination of man can conceive.' But you see, it is almost certain that in some cases vivisection has produced good results, so it is encouraged rather than put down, and endowed with large sums of money."

"Is it always used for direct purposes of healing?"

"Well, no: usually for scientific research—from the desire to see what the effect of such and such an operation will be."

"But do you do this to innocent animals, or only to those who deserve extreme punishment?"

"Oh, any that come to hand will do. In some large European capitals dogs are imported by hundreds of thousands to be operated upon, under *curare*. But you must remember that doctors—at least most of them—say that very great discoveries have been made by it."

"But are not these villains afraid of the gods?"

"Most do not believe in the gods: and those who do, make it a piece of piety to say that animals are made for the use of man, for him to do as he likes with."

"But do not the people rise and stone them, or the wise men shew their wickedness?"

"They are our wise men, and the people follow and admire them. I believe there is only one country in Europe, my own, where cruelty is at all looked upon as a crime, and even there all the richer classes delight to spend half their time in killing small animals and birds."

"Of course they do," said Wibbling to himself; "it's the jolliest thing in the world and a man's a fool who doesn't enjoy it."

CHAPTER X.

A SILENCE followed these words ; Ariphton appeared horrified at the account he had heard of European civilization ; and the others, who had not intended in any way to shock his feelings, were wondering whether things at home were really as bad as they sounded. Just at this juncture, Wibbling, who had been leaning out of the window broke the silence :

"Here comes what's his name and the scribes."

Ariphton, though he did not understand the words, guessed their meaning :

"Ah, is Algernon coming back ? He is very diligent at his work."

"What is it exactly that he is engaged upon—he told us it was somehow connected with Ethics ?"

"His subject is, I believe, the Cantogrian * philosophy."

"Is that a system of yours ?"

"No, it is a European system—so I am told ; but I do not quite understand about it."

"Did you ever hear of it, Mavrones ?" said Baj : "I never did."

At this moment, just as Mavrones was expressing his ignorance, and Wibbling beginning to explain that the Cantogrians were a sect of dissenters, Trench entered the room.

Can any reader explain this term ? Mr. Mavrones forgot to ask the meaning of it, but remembers that it was used by Ariphton in the accusative —"ten Kantogren philosophian."

"Greeting, Ariphron," said he; "I am sorry I was out when you arrived. Of course you will stop to dinner. Have you been discussing European manners?"

"Yes," said Ariphron, "and I have heard such things as make me doubt whether any European should set foot in our city again."

"Surely, you don't mean that? . . . You must have heard all the bad side—besides, think what good your example will do."

"You speak well, though mocking. But I must consult with the Elders before the strangers have entry to our town."

"At any rate, it is lunch time now. I thought we would make an expedition to the caves this afternoon: I hope you will join us—then we will tell you all the good side of European life."

Ariphron consented and they went out into the hall and up-stairs. "How is the red flower?" said Ariphron in a low tone to Trench.

"It is coming out surprisingly fast. I should think it would be full in a week from now."

"Not before?"

"Sensely: ~~ever~~ then it would be very early."

Trench passed across to Mavroncs and Baj: "For heaven's sake be careful," he said: "if the Elders suspect that European influence is demoralizing, they will never let you come among the Greeks, perhaps turn you out of the country altogether."

They came down to lunch, not in the large hall, but a room next to it, luxuriously furnished in a dim peacock blue, where the Autocrat was wont to hold his smaller entertainments. Two Sannian nobles, distinguished by red cloaks and great crests of feathers, were waiting when they arrived. After the first

salutation, Trench looked suddenly anxious: "Where is Kioung-boq?" he asked.

"He said he was going to kill a sheep," said one of the nobles, "but would certainly be back in time for lunch."

"We will not wait," answered the Autocrat.

When they had been seated for a few minutes, the tardy guest appeared—a short broad-chested chief with an excited look. He prostrated himself before Trench's feet:

"One of my sheep, O master, was seized by a devil, so I had to go home and kill it; but the devil took it up the mountain, and I had to chase it for a long time, and at last. . . ."

"Very good," said Trench; "get up and take your seat."

These conversations had been conducted in Sannian, which of course was not generally intelligible; but Trench now introduced Kioung-boq to the party, mentioning that he could speak Greek.

When lunch was over, Trench spoke for a few moments with the Sannians, leaving Aripbron with the Englishmen. Two of the chiefs prostrated themselves and left the room. Kioung-boq remained. "I have asked Kioung-boq to join our expedition to the caves," said Trench. "He knows the way among them underground better than I do."

"We shall be very pleased to have more conversation with him," said Mavrones, looking at the green ferocious face of the little savage, who was expressing his pleasure by a very artificial grin.

"How shall we go?" asked Baj.

"I and Mr. Wibbling and Kioung-boq in one carriage," said the Autocrat, "and you three in the other."

"Hang it though," said Wibbling; "I want to bait that old Greek."

"My arrangements are never modified, Mr. Wibbling," was the royal reply.

They went out and sat for half-an-hour in the veranda, chatting on indifferent topics.

"By the way," said Mavrones to Trench, "how is it that the Greeks have become so surprisingly humane and high-minded? When did they improve so much?"

"Mostly after settling here: you see they had no foreign politics and no great difficulties at home. They spent the whole of their energies on raising the whole nation to the level of the best individuals. There's a book on it, I'll shew you. But here are the carriages."

The carriages were light and open, with particularly large wheels, like an American buggy. It was a royal privilege among the Sanni to drive horses; none of the nobles might drive or ride save on a mule or donkey, and the common people were only allowed their own feet to carry them. The party drove in a north-easterly direction towards that range of peaks which the travellers had crossed on their arrival. Their way ran at first along the open plain, following the road, which seemed to lead straight up to a great pile of granite, and there to cease. The blocks heaped up one upon the other, with some of the largest balancing hazardously at the top, looked like a tower built by giants at play: the surface appeared blank and solid: for at a short distance off you could not see the winding cleft, which ran in between the rocks into an uncertain darkness.

"You don't use camels here?" observed Mavrones, as they sat down in the carriage.

"No : they were imported at one time, about Planctiad 500, but our lawgiver. . . ."

"Planctiad? What is that?"

"The feast of Apollo Planctes, kept every four years since our exile—this for instance is the middle of 625. Well, our lawgiver thought such animals could do no good ; so they were sent out of the land."

• "Why did he object to them?"

"He said a brute so ill-favoured should not be seen by children, and also that such sadness and helplessness were better away. He also bade them send away swine as an ugly and evil thing."

"Who was this lawgiver?"

"Ah, I forgot you would not know. I will tell you his story. Soon after our fathers had subdued the Sanni and built our city, they gave themselves up to the arts of peace, and became great sculptors and painters and poets ; and then began the care for science. Science grew very quickly and crushed all beside it, and the citizens threw off their old religion, and despised poetry and art. Then railways by steam were invented, and the printing of books ; and we went far and wide trading, and some men became very rich. Now the greatest of the men of science and the sternest was Perissokles the son of Eumēchanos. He got great power in the city and mocked the poets and priests, and said there were no gods and that righteousness was convenience only. Now he collected all the wild animals on the mountains, and kept them in cages, studying the make and manner of them ; and when he had got all the beasts here, he went away to collect more, and sojourned in strange countries and no man heard of him for many years : and there was great mourning for him, for he was considered the wisest of all men. At last, when all that generation

was dead, an old man exceeding sad came to the Mountain, and the guards suffered him not to enter, but turned him back; and he said, "I am Perissokles, the son of Eumêchanos, and having learnt wondrous wisdom in strange countries, I am come back to save you: therefore will you let me in." And the guards were amazed, thinking him long dead, whose greatness they had heard from their fathers. Yet, fearing much, they let him in, and he went to the market place and assembled the people, and when they were met together, he said: "I am Perissokles, the son of Eumêchanos, and am come back having learned many and wonderful things, but chiefly these:—that much knowledge avails little, and the pride of man brings a vengeance that ceases not. Wherefore let me rule over you for twelve months, else you will perish utterly and all your city."

"And it happened that all were afraid, and they let him govern. And he set up the worship of the gods again, and forbade merchants to go to distant countries: and he honoured not the rich nor those who wore precious garments: and he destroyed the steamways, and suffered not Greeks to live among the Sanni, nor trade with them deceitfully, and made no more printed books, and allowed no one to hunt beasts nor keep them in cages to study. And having done all these things and many more, when his year was passed, he went away alone on foot over the desert southwards, and no tidings ever came of him again. That is the story of Perissokles: we all learn it when we are children."

"Why did he abolish printed books?" asked Mavrones after a pause.

"He said that men having many books read them lightly and despise them: and that no man should

read any book that was not worth copying out with his own hand. For that more harm was done by evil books than men suspected."

"But do you still copy out every book you read?"

"Yes: we go through the greatest writers at school, copying out each book as we read; and so every person has a library of so many books as he has read."

"But what if a person sells his books?"

"O stranger, that would be disgraceful!"

"What becomes of the books when a man dies?"

"The linen on which they are written does not long outlive him: some are given to the libraries at the temples, but the writing soon grows dim and the linen decays."

"But surely you do not still follow out his directions literally?"

"No: he left no definite rule: he started a certain spirit among the people, that was all."

"What was the objection to railways?"

"He said they only helped an enemy to invade us—for at that time the rich men began to make railways over the desert: and he had a saying, that it was bad to be surrounded by many mechanical conveniences, which made life more complicated and hid the working of the gods. So he abolished railways and many other new inventions, but he left us one invention which we always used very greatly: it is called "Dynamitis."

"The deuce it is!" cried Baj, startled out of decorum; then in Greek: "that is an explosive, I presume—the same is largely used in Europe by certain political parties."

"Oh, no. It is not an explosive, it is a natural fluid: Algernon says you have found out a little

about it in Europe—you call it some name like Electro. . .”

“Electricity no doubt: what do you use it for?”

“It was invented for a defence against invasion: we can make a line of force round the whole country, so that any person touching the rocks is struck dead.”

“Touching any part of the rock? We could not do that by electricity.”

“Any part on the outside surface. It can be done at a few minutes’ notice: the force of the large waterfall is enough to keep the dynamitis on the rocks outside always in action. But we now use it chiefly for sending messages, or building large temples, or for such kinds of labour as do not beseem the dignity of man.”

“You are wonderfully prepared against invasion. I suppose no one is likely to attempt such a thing.”

“I should think no one; the Kolo, the brigands of the desert, have occasionally tried to get into the plateau unseen: we never had to use any explosives though—a few young men went out with spears and drove them off.”

“Has no one tried to imitate your inventions?”

“They all try:—once we had a deputation from the Khalkas, offering ten tons of silver if we would teach them to make our shell; and when we refused, they offered the same if we would sell them twenty shells to use against the Chinese; and another time the Chinese offered us nearly as much. . . . The neighbouring peoples really fancy the explosive more formidable than it is: they think, if one shell were to go off up here, all the table land would be in ruins. . . . What a splendid view of those peaks to the right. Take my field-glasses.”

Baj looked out, and saw a cluster of peaks of no great height, but jagged in outline and piled in fantastic shapes. Wherever the narrowest foothold appeared among the precipices a kindly vegetation covered the naked ground, not only pines and stunted mountain shrubs, but trees with light green leaves and rich undergrowth through which appeared at intervals gleaming masses of a dark red mountain rose that blooms in the recesses of the hills of Tartary. A slant sunlight fell upon the slopes and tinged the snow delicately.

"What a beautiful mountain," said Baj, "we must go there as soon as you are well enough, Mavrones."

"O, Mavrones will be quite well to-morrow," said the doctor, "if he is careful this afternoon."

The carriage was now entering the narrow defile that led seemingly into the heart of the great blocks in front. The steep sides seemed to draw nearer together as the party went further in, and dark runlets of water trickled down the slate. At length the horse stopped before a spot where the side rocks had fallen in, leaving only a dark hole in front, not large enough for a carriage to enter. Getting out, the party in the second vehicle found Trench standing amid a knot of Sannians, giving directions about the torches, the horses, and the chair in which two bearers were to carry Mavrones.

When all was ready: "Kioung-boq," said Trench, "you had better go first, as you know the way." The small square chieftain put himself in front, and they entered the passage leading to the great caves. The passage was quite dark except for the uncertain glare of the torches, and wound like the Labyrinth among blacker openings, that led, none knew whither, under the mountains, round many bends and corners mysteri-

ously. Stalactites there were none noticeable; only black oozy walls of slate, brightened rarely by spaces of granite: air cold and dank: and a sodden floor crossed by trickling water. The way led always down; the dull echo they heard on entering the caverns grew louder and more deafening as they penetrated deeper below ground, and mixed at intervals with the same sounds of angry wailing which had disturbed the Englishmen on their first arrival. A long walk brought them to a vast round chamber of granite, worn smooth by water in past times, from which several passages ran in various directions. A short distance beyond this, they came in view of the daylight again, and found themselves in the opening of a cave looking up at the very cataract over which their boat had plunged the day before. All the air was filled with the noise and whirl of the crashing volume of water. They strained their eyes to see the top, but all definite lines were lost in a mist of spray: they peered down at the bottom, but all was turmoil and dim foam, and nothing remained in their minds but the thunder and the darkness and the deep-hued rainbow in the mist above.

"The most wonderful caves of all," said Trench to Mavrones, "are down that alley opposite. The Sanni are all afraid to go there because of the devils. I was shown the way by an old lunatic, who used to live mostly in these caves till I built him a hut outside. The people used to bring him meat and drink daily, and he would stand up and curse them like a fiend."

"Was it on his account that they fancied the caves haunted?"

"Well, they get their devils partly from the sulphur and the noises—but partly from tradition, because these caves were the old place of execution of

the Sannian chiefs. It is a sin to shed royal blood ; so, when they wanted to make away with a prince, they used to take him blindfold down to the darkest part, and then leave him roped to a stake to be drowned by the rising water. You know, there is a kind of tide in the lake—that is to say, the springs increase in force twice in twenty four hours, and the evaporation is enormous. But I was going to tell you about my old lunatic. It seems he was a favourite of one of the chiefs, who was attacked by his enemies about thirty years before I came. The chief was taken down to those furthest vaults and tied up with a rope ; while my friend was stunned with a knock on the head, and left free in another cave. When he came to, he was of course in utter darkness, but groped about as best he could, trying to escape. The water was rising fast and steaming with sulphur. He said he felt a horror at the touch of it, and clung to the sides of the gallery so as not to let even his feet feel it, though he knew he must be drowned unless he searched everywhere for a passage out. As the water rose higher, he tried to climb further up the sides of the cave, and somehow discovered a hole in the roof: he got through, and found another gallery, running on top of the place where he had been left, and well out of the water's reach. There was a little dim light, but no apparent opening towards the air. He groped his way along the passage till he came to another gap, through which he looked. After a few moments he heard gibbering laughter, and made out dimly the figure of his master, the water almost up to his mouth, struggling wildly in his ropes, raving mad. There was a drop of about ten or twelve feet down to the water, and of course a chance that there might be no safe bottom. The man

jumped it, and groped along to his master, who only shrieked and struggled the more. He managed with difficulty to undo the knot, when the madman plunged away from him and sank. When he came to the surface he was dead. The other climbed back into the passage above; he wandered about in the darkness for several hours, and when at last he found a way out to the daylight, high up in the mountains, he was a madman too."

"What an awful story!" said Mavrones; "no wonder he cursed the men who brought him food."

"Surely it's easy enough to find your way out of a cave like this at a pinch," commented Wibbling, who had overheard the anecdote, "as long as you don't lose your head."

"More difficult than you fancy, even from here—from the further caves it is almost impossible unless you know the way."

"By the bye," said Mavrones, "are we at the mercy of Kioung-boq? He does not look the most trustworthy of men."

"Kioung-boq? No; I only brought him here to be out of mischief. I know the way perfectly."

"What a smash you could make with your Greck shell down here," said Wibbling: "you ought to let it off next November."

"Yes, it would be destructive. I think we ought to return, it is rather late. I will walk on with Kioung-boq."

The party collected themselves together; and when Mavrones, who had been limping by himself in the great chamber, was once more in his sedan, they threaded the oozy gallery back towards their place of entrance.

"Do you remember any executions here?" en-

quired the Autocrat of Kioung-boq. "The old lunatic who lived by the entrance used to speak of them."

"Yes: I remember two—one when I was very little. We found the skeletons, when we went down to tie up the last king," said the old savage with a sinister smile. "But that kind of punishment is quite out of date now."

"So I suppose. You're taking the wrong turning—we go to the left."

CHAPTER XI.

NEXT morning at breakfast the travellers' conversation turned upon the plans of the day. The chief object of their whole journey could not yet be realized. Before they could enter the Græek city, it was requisite that Ariphton should bring back a report of the strangers, and the Elders determine whether they were to be admitted or no. Accordingly, after a long discussion, in which Trench and Mavrones and Baj tried in vain to convince Ariphton that the Hellenes had got their history wrong and ante-dated their capture by Persia at least 116 years, so that the present time was not really Planctiad 625 but 596,—Baj broached his project of ascending the mountain to the south-east, which had struck his fancy so pleasantly as they were driving to the caves. He was anxious to start immediately after breakfast, if Mavrones was able to walk; but Trench, who had no scruple in "modifying" the plans of others, made a different suggestion.

"The great thing to see from that mountain is the sunrise: it is called Phacîra, you know, because it catches the light a long time before the rest of the country."

"How can we manage to see the sunrise there? Start at night?"

"Better start in the afternoon and take a tent with you: then you can spend a night on the mountain and not tire yourselves . . . You get a view over the

desert for a tremendous way, and you see the light gradually touch the rest of the peaks . . . it is really very fine. I wish I could come with you."

"Can't you come?"

"No; this is rather a busy time in several ways—though certainly everything seems quiet enough . . . Still I ought to be here in case of any uproar from Klāstanri's people. Besides there is my work with the scribes which I mustn't leave."

"If there is really any danger, hadn't we better stay with you?" said Baj.

"Oh, no; I shall manage quite well; besides, the flower cannot come out for a week at the very least, and then you will be back again."

"Well, I hope there will be no disturbance. I suppose we three had better start this afternoon?"

"I don't know who you mean by 'three,'" interjected Wibbling, "I'm not going up the mountain."

"Ah, that makes two," said Baj; "but when had we better start?"

"Oh, I'll speak to the guide about that . . . You don't mind taking Kioung-boq, do you?"

"Not in the least. Is he a guide?"

"No; but he is rather an excitable person; I like to get him out of the way."

"Oh, we shall be very glad to have him. I suppose you could not wait and come with us?" added Baj to Ariphron; "we should be very pleased."

"No; I cannot stay away from my work any longer. I shall have to return in about an hour."

The first part of the morning, accordingly, was spent in arranging Ariphron's departure; Trench, a monarch of clock-like precision in his habits, went off, after a brief apology, to his business with the scribes, so that Mavrones and Baj were left to tend

Ariphron's needs. They were idly inclined and had an interest in making him comfortable, as he was to bring back to the Greek Elders an account of their appearance and manners, and decide whether they were worthy to be admitted into such an exclusive community. So they talked about the charities of London and the suppression of the slave trade ; and admitted they might be wrong about the date of the Persian captivity ; and praised the treatment of Mavrones' ankle ; and explained what good it would do poor barbarians like themselves to see and converse with such superior people as the Greeks. He drove off seemingly full of good will, and it was with a hope that they had retrieved the error of their impolitic disclosures, that the two friends strolled along the great avenue and out across the plain, till they found the Autocrat dictating to his circle of scribes. They listened for a short time, but finding that their presence made Trench immediately stop his dictation, while all the scribes began to giggle, they left him again, and spent the rest of the morning reading the newly discovered literature in the veranda. So the day passed pleasantly enough, till at length Trench had returned, and lunch was over, and the guide was being instructed in their plan of proceeding.

Kiung-boq must have been a very busy man, for this time also he arrived late and out of breath just as he had at lunch the day before. His excuses being fluent and satisfactory, the party collected their accoutrements and set off about four o'clock. The tent had been given up, as Trench suddenly remembered having ordered two huts to be built upon the mountain for the convenience of some Greek visitors of his last year, and the guide reported they were in good condition. The expedition consisted of

five members : Mavrones, Baj, Kioung-boq, a guide, and a mule, the last-named being employed in carrying food and ropes, and intended to support Mavrones should his ankle give way after all. The journey over the plain to the mountain foot was uneventful and a little long. The sun was setting when they reached the lowest slopes ; and before they had got within two hours' walk of the hut, the darkness began to make their way difficult, and it was decided to continue their march with torches. The torches had been packed up with the rest of the baggage in the mule's pack, and Kioung-boq was just unfastening the straps of the bundle, when a man suddenly leaped out of the bushes, whispered a few words to him, and was gone again before the others had recovered from their surprise.

"What was that ?" cried Baj.

Kioung-boq was looking hard at something in his hand.

"The man wanted to make you a little offering, but, fearing to speak to such great chiefs face to face, he told me to hand it on to you with his homage and respect. Look," he said, holding out his hand to Mavrones ; "it is a little shell that is found rarely on this mountain : you can not see distinctly now, but I expect the inside is marked in curious shapes with red."

The guide kindled a light, and they saw the shell clearly : it was very delicate and white, except for some curious tracery in deep red running round the cup of it.

"It is a lovely little shell," said Mavrones ; "I wish the man had waited to be thanked. Doesn't that crimson look as if an artist had dyed it ?"

"Yes—one can hardly believe it is natural," said Baj. "What is the matter ?"

The last remark was addressed to Kioung-boq, who had uttered an exclamation of annoyance. "The torches are not here," he said, "we must have left them behind."

"I am almost sure I saw them put in," said Baj. "Let us look through the pack again."

They all looked, but no torches were to be seen. The two Europeans determined to push on as best they could in the darkness. But Kioung-boq would not hear of this, and wanted to run down to the plain and borrow torches from the first house he should come to. "It was my fault," he said; "I ought to have looked after the packing."

At first the rest of the party demurred, and would not hear of his taking so much trouble upon himself; but Kioung-boq persisted, and it was at last arranged that he should go back as quickly as possible to the nearest house, while the others progressed slowly towards the hut. No sooner was the arrangement made, than Kioung-boq departed at full speed down the hill-side, his long red plumes dancing somewhat grimly in the night air. His figure soon disappeared among the dark rocks below, and the rest of the party proceeded to refasten the pack, which had been emptied and thrown into confusion by the search for the missing torches. They were groping on the ground to see if anything was left behind, when suddenly the guide gave a cry. There was very little communication between the fellow travellers now, excepting by signs; for the Sannian understood no language but his own, and the mule was too wise to care for conversation with strangers. They looked round and saw the guide holding up with a grin the torches poor Kioung-boq had gone all the way back to fetch. He pointed to a little bush as the spot where he had

found them : apparently they had fallen out of the pack when it was first opened, without any one hearing them drop, and so all their searchings had naturally been in vain. Amused at the incident, they lighted their torches and shouted repeatedly for Kioung-boq : at last when it became obvious that he could neither hear their voices nor see the brands they waved above their heads, they set themselves again in motion and climbed onwards towards the hut.

Kioung-boq must have found some difficulty in borrowing torches to suit his mind, for several hours passed and he did not return. At last they reached the hut, and lighted a fire, and enjoyed a modest supper in the society of the Sannian guide, a genial fellow, who only wanted a language to make him an excellent companion. They retired to rest soon, mindful of the early waking incumbent on those who wish to see the sun rise ; but it was well past midnight before the unfortunate Kioung-boq returned, hot and breathless as usual, with four extra torches in his hands. He was grieved to be so late—deeply grieved :—he had had to go to several houses in succession before he could get any torches ; then he had lost his way coming up the mountain again in the darkness—for he could not venture to burn for himself the brands intended to light the august guests of the king. The thing he seemed to regret most was the loss of his cap of feathers, which had been brushed off by a branch and blown away. All savages are vain it seems, even such a superior soul as Kioung-boq. He ate an indifferent supper with a fairly good grace, and lay down to rest by the fire. He was soon enjoying his hard-earned sleep ; while Mavrones, who was one of those people who cannot sleep again if once disturbed, sat up by the fire for a short time,

and then took a walk outside till it was time to start.

There were other sleepless heads that nights besides Mavroneſ'. The sun, which rose a couple of hours later and looked in at the silent palace on the plain, found the king sitting at his window deep in thought: thought which must have been painful and difficult, to judge by his expression.

When the party to the mountain had started that afternoon, Trench had felt a certain tenderness of conscience at the peremptory manner in which he had so often disposed of Wibbling, and determined to make himself as agreeable as he could without inconvenience. He succeeded so well, that, when, soon after dinner, he had to absent himself for an hour to receive the reports of some sanitary officers, and to send some despatches to the Greek government, Wibbling considered himself directly slighted by this neglect, and sat sullenly in the front library reading by himself. At last the commissioners were gone and the despatches posted to the Greek city, announcing the satisfactory state of popular feeling: the people were more loyal than they had been for some time past, and certainly there was nothing to fear for the next five or six days. There was a regular post between the palace and the City, though it did not run daily; and the couriers were the only persons exempted from the Sannian rule against the riding of horses. When all was settled, Trench returned to his guest, whom he found in the worst depths of misanthropy and surliness. Though disposed to be friendly, Trench was in no wise disconcerted by his companion's truculence; but, easily adapting himself to the situation, read with as much enjoyment as if no

Wibbling had been there. Either by nature or owing to his long habit of ruling, Trench had the rare gift of being able to ignore the sentiments of others. He did not take pleasure in overcoming opposition, but did so as a matter of course when occasion demanded. Besides, his own extraordinary intellectual power made it easy for him to despise weak or foolish people. Nay, more than easy: for has not Buddha counted it among the twenty difficult duties in human life, "not to condemn a man who has not studied."

The two had been reading silently for half an hour when Trench suddenly rose and went to the window.

"Oblige me by ceasing to gasp, Mr. Wibbling," he observed. "Do you hear that noise?"

"I don't know what on earth you mean! I don't hear any noise."

"Then listen."

The deep silence out of doors was broken by a long low hoot seeming to come from among the trees of the park. After a moment's silence the cry was repeated, and a rustling heard among some bushes that grew close to the palace on the left side.

"I should think it was an owl," said Wibbling, "or perhaps a bear. Have you many wild animals up here?"

Trench must have been nervous touching wild animals, for his face was very white and stern as he replied:

"That is the cry of a wild beast unknown in Europe. Will you come out with me and look for it?"

"No. Catch me going out in the cold to look for bears."

"I think I must," said Trench, opening the door.

Wibbling, with a languid interest, followed him as far as the hall and saw him go out into the darkness. The Sanni were early in their habits, and all the palace was asleep by this time, so there was no porter at the gate. In a few moments Trench returned: "I will take a spear," he said, coming to the room where his weapons were kept: "I once got a prize for javelin-throwing among the Greeks," he added with a smile, as he walked out again poising the heavy shaft in his hand.

Wibbling waited in the hall a few moments, and then, as the air was chilly, returned to his corner by the fire. He picked up his book, which, being Greek, and in MS., had little charms for him, and was thinking sleepily whether the fire wanted poking or not, when the noise of a living thing rushing among the trees startled him. Then came a fierce shriek, like the cry of a wounded animal, and all was still. Wibbling leapt from his seat and looked out at the window: "He has killed it, whatever it was," he muttered. Then came a doubt: it was more like a man's cry than a beast's. Could Trench himself be killed? There was no answering his question, as the night outside was moonless and impenetrably black. He sat down again and waited; then he heard slow steps in the passage: it was Trench, paler and sterner than before: he was moving slowly, and the spear in his hand was dripping with blood. "Well, you killed it," said Wibbling in an off-hand tone.

"Yes: I killed it," said Trench. "Will you give me a glass of water?"

Wibbling's curiosity was piqued; but, with the cunning commonly found in minds of his stamp, he concealed his desire to know the whole story, by an

air of utter indifference. Trench drank the water silently, and did not move from his chair.

"How did it happen?" asked Wibbling after a time. Curiosity for the moment had triumphed over pride; but when Trench still sat silent and deep in thought, paying no heed to his companion's question, pride reasserted itself. "I am going to bed now," said Wibbling, expecting Trench to detain him anxiously and tell the story of his hunt with full details.

"Good night," said Trench absently. Wibbling was furious; but he had brought the defeat upon himself, and felt compelled to go up to his room, with whatever evil grace.

The Autocrat sat for some minutes in the same position. Then he lifted up two objects he was carrying in his left hand and examined them closely. One he recognized with certainty, but the other baffled him. Presently he rose and touched the knob of a little bell. "Sagna is the man to ask; luckily he is the greatest coward in the house," he muttered, as he sat down again.

In a few minutes an attendant appeared, still heavy with sleep, and knelt down at his master's feet.

"Sagna," said Trench, "you are appointed my steward. Bring in your predecessor's body. You will find it near the path in front. Take a lantern."

The servant, staggered and amazed, lit a lantern, and went out. When he returned Trench was standing spear in hand in front of the fire.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"Quite dead," answered the servant, shivering with fear.

"Do you recognize that?" Trench pointed to a crest of high red plumes that lay on the table.

"Oh, have mercy upon me! It might belong to any of the chiefs," cried the man, falling again on his knees.

"Liar! whose is it? Look again."

"It is Kioung-boq's," groaned the savage, scarcely above his breath.

"What is this?" asked the master, holding up his hand. He held a little shell, white and delicate, with strange marks in the interior, of a deep red stain.

The man sank helplessly on the ground. Trench raised his spear and held the point touching his neck. "Tell me at once," he said sternly.

"It is the token of Klastanri," sobbed the crouching figure.

"What does it mean?"

"It is a signal to rise and slay Klastanri's enemies."

"How soon?"

"The day after it is sent round."

"To-morrow? But the flower is not yet out."

"No, they feared the enemies of Klastanri would be prepared."

"They intend to attack me unawares? Have you all received the sign?"

"No, no, I swear I have never seen it for years, I swear by all . . ."

"Did you know that dead man was going to fetch it?"

The man sobbed piteously: a touch of the spear blade made him speak. "Yes he told me."

"Does every one know?"

"The chiefs who worship Klastanri are sending round the red shell. None have come to the palace yet, but I expect all outside have been warned."

“Does any one in the palace know beside yourself?”

“The steward said he had told only me.”

There was a short pause: the Greeks must be told at once. A thousand of them would be enough to quell the rising without bloodshed. How could a message be made to reach them? There was of course a telegraphic apparatus at the Palace, but it was sure to have been destroyed. The courier was gone, bearing that unlucky report of security. The courier was a Greek. Now there were none but Sannians in the house, and not a Sannian could be trusted for an instant by the King . . . Was there not a single man to depend upon? He thought of Wibbling? He would be sure to blunder or get caught by the enemy: he might even refuse to go—Still he could be trusted . . . No; it was impossible; Wibbling did not know the way; and to err once would be fatal . . . Should he fly himself? No; nothing would drive him to that. He remembered with bitterness how he had once fled, and determined never to be reproached again for leaving his post. If only a messenger could be trusted . . . Was the creature in front of him coward enough to be frightened into faithfulness? He considered him for a moment—No: any new fear would turn him traitor. Still he might be utilized.

“I think I shall kill you;” he said at last.—“You are proved a traitor by your own words.” He lifted his spear, and the man fell into a flood of tears and prayers for mercy.

“You shall take word then to the Greek Elders;” said Trench. The savage clutched at this one chance of salvation.

“I swear I will always be faithful to you if you

spare my life. I will bless your name and never betray you."

"You will have no opportunity. Stay where you are."

Trench wrote a few lines on a square piece of linen, rolled and sealed it and gave it to the man.

"Follow me to the stable," he said.

"But, master," cried the Sannian, "I cannot ride, and the law does not allow it."

"I absolve you from the law. You will find no difficulty in keeping your seat."

"But master, I cannot guide an ass."

"You shall go on the post horse—don't touch him and he will find his way." They were at the stable door, which Trench opened by his own key. The post horse was saddled and Sagna made to mount. As soon as he was in the saddle, Trench took a long rope, and passing it twice round the steward's arms and body, tied him down in his seat. The beast was sure to go the right way, he thought. The only danger was that Sagna might turn traitor and call for help to the other savages; or guide the horse purposely in the wrong direction. No chance of that must be left. Trench put a gag over the rider's mouth, and pinioned his arms behind his back with straps. He then wrapped him in a large cloak for protection against the night wind, a cloak such as the couriers wore, attached by one fastening at the neck and capable of being wrapped twice round the body. In the breast of this garment he pinned the letter. The horse was frightened at these strange preparations and showed signs of restiveness. Trench led the animal with its speechless and immovable rider outside the stable, and started it by a cut of his whip. He watched it spring forward, gallop at full speed down the avenue, and

take without hesitation the road to the right, leading to the Greek city: then he turned back to the palace and sat sleepless in his room till the morning dawned.

The horse rushed through the air frightened by its strange master, and still more by the ceaseless irritation of the straps and rope ends, which flapped and whipped against its sides. The night was absolutely dark, but the horse found no difficulty in going at full speed along the road he knew so well. The way was broad and flat for the first ten miles. There were tall trees planted thinly at the roadside, through which the lights of Sannian cottages were here and there clearly visible. Few living persons were to be seen upon the path, and none offered any hindrance to the horse's progress. Only once did a human voice cross that post-rider's way. At the door of one of the cottages, a small knot of men were talking together. "A pleasant ride," cried one, as the horse galloped by; there was something sinister in his voice; but no answer came from that reeling and furious horseman.

At last no more cottages were to be seen on the roadside: the country grew wilder and more overgrown with trees, as it sloped downwards to the lower plain. A continuous slope of two miles between barren moors led to a narrow and precipitous cutting through the low line of hills which separated the territories of Greek and Sannian. Suddenly four dark figures started up from the path. The horse reared back one moment, terrified at the apparition: but the straps rattled and beat at his sides, and the clinging voiceless rider swung helplessly to and fro; and, just at the moment of hesitation, the horse saw at the roadside the bodies of another horse and another rider, the horse his own companion in the stable, and the rider

marked by his white tunic for a Greek courier, rolled together stark and bloody in the ditch : driven frantic with fear, the animal plunged wildly among the four savages who blocked the way, knocked two to the ground, and rushed onward like the wind down the steep road that led towards the Greek city. The cry of the four men, "Stop or you die !" was unanswered, but two knives came whizzing through the air as the unknown messenger swept past.

Soon after the sun rose that morning, there was a clatter of hoofs in the market place of the Greek city ; and the few who were abroad to see, saw a black horse panting with exertion and splashed with foam, stop suddenly before the posthouse : and the rider was a man bound, swaying backwards and forwards even when the horse was still ; his hands tied behind his back, and his mouth fastened with a gag—a strange courier, with no message to deliver and with no voice to speak ; for the knife that was there sticking in his throat had cut the fastening of his cloak away ; the letter was gone with it, and the voiceless rider could speak no more. ,

CHAPTER XII.

SOON after sunrise Trench left his thoughtful attitude by the window, and walked down the corridor to Wibbling's bedroom. Knowing that the occupant would not be in a position to answer, he did not knock at the door, but went in and shook the sleeper's arm.

"What is the matter?" murmured Wibbling. "Is it very late?"

"Wake up, your life is in danger; you must get into hiding before any one is about."

Wibbling had too often been roused at home by announcements that the house was on fire and breakfast quite cold, to pay much heed to this admonition. He turned his head away and said—"All right: I will get up." Trench shook him violently and repeated his warning. "You may be murdered any moment, I tell you: a conspiracy has broken out against me, and you are sure to be attacked as well. Get up!"

"A conspiracy? Oh, curse it all! How horrid! Why can't we get away somewhere?"

"Here is your choice. You can try to escape to the Greek frontier, where you will be quite safe. But probably by this time the road is guarded by the conspirators, and any one trying to pass will be murdered. You might possibly get away to the mountains at the back and conceal yourself for a day or two. But the odds are very great that you would be caught on the way."

"Good God! What am I to do? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I only discovered it last night. There is one other chance for you. You can hide here in the treasure room where I keep the bomb."

"The bomb! Why don't you assemble the people outside and fire it among them?"

"That is out of the question. Dress quickly and I will shew you the way."

Wibbling was dressing with all the haste possible. Presently he came back to his old idea.

"Why is it out of the question? It would crush the rising in a moment—and you don't seem able to crush it any other way."

"I am helpless till the Greeks come. I have sent a message to summon them. But at the worst it is obviously better that they should put you and me to death, than that I should exterminate the whole people."

"I'm damned if I see it! I'll let it off myself if they come near."

"You can't. You don't know how to."

Wibbling finished dressing silently. "I'm ready now," he said: "why the devil couldn't you find out this conspiracy before?"

"Your slippers creak: take them off again."

He did as he was told, then asked in a querulous tone:

"What is the good of hiding me in a treasure chamber? They're sure to break it open first thing."

"It is the safest place there is. It is guarded by a machine that kills any one who opens the door by force."

"But look here, are you going to shut me in a room with a bomb and an infernal machine?"

"There is no danger. Come quickly and don't speak."

They threaded more than one long corridor, and

stopped in a part of the palace Wibbling had never yet entered, before a large door of iron, which seemed built into the granite wall. Trench produced a key of curious shape from his pocket, and pressed it into a small lock close against the stone. The door swung open at once, and Wibbling leaped back in affright. Directly in front, and aiming straight at the doorway stood a gigantic machine holding a hundred arrows sharp as knives and massive as lances, drawn to the head upon enormous bows. It is the same instrument that defends against despoilers the tombs of the ancient Tartar kings.

"Go in," said Trench; "it only shoots when the door is opened violently."

"Where is the bomb?" questioned Wibbling below his breath.

"That is it"—he pointed to a round mass wrapped in felt, like a gigantic lawn-tennis ball, which stood on a tripod in one corner of the room. Round the walls were shelves and small iron boxes: on the floor iron boxes of greater size.

"It is very cold," said Wibbling. "How long shall I have to stay here?"

"I expect all will be over by to-night. Here is a cloak: you will find some food in the pocket."

Trench closed the door and was gone. The bows of the great machine slackened, and Wibbling was left alone with the iron cases and the two instruments of death. It had not occurred to him till then that it was impossible to get out of the treasure chamber without help. There was one small window: but it was closely barred, and too high from the ground for any one to climb out. He tried the door: there was no knob or handle, but he remembered that it opened outwards, and pushed against it with all his might. A

slight click from behind startled him, and he looked round to see the arrows again drawn half to the head and pointing full towards him. He leaped back from the doorway, and seating himself upon an iron box, waited despairingly for his fate. He saw that to cry out would be worse than useless, as giving a sign to the conspirators of his whereabouts, and he realized that Trench would hardly have locked him in, unless there was some other person besides himself, who had means of opening the door without bringing down the arrows. There was cold comfort in this; but Wibbling had no other, and was fain to sit angrily upon the chest wrapped in his cloak, considering alternately the bomb and the engine of missiles, and listening for the first noise of insurrection.

Trench returned to his room, and spent an hour in resting upon his bed. In spite of the labour and anxiety of the night he felt no inclination to sleep. The extremity of his danger had even given him an unusual calm and self-reliance. What troubled him most was the condition of the two guests who were no doubt at that moment climbing at the extreme peak of Mount Phacira, in complete unconsciousness of the dangers awaiting them below. If they chanced in their journey down to fall in with a crowd of Klastanri's fanatic worshippers, their doom was sealed, and that first taste of human blood would turn the festival to a scene of general carnage. His only hope was by a fearless and masterful bearing to keep discontent quiet till assistance should arrive from the Greeks. He almost regretted now the case with which he had consented to the stipulation of the Greeks, that he should have no bodyguard: it was the same now as the preceding night; he was absolutely destitute of allies and could only stand by his own strength.

It is curious how childish habits will assert themselves in times of great danger or excitement. Trench was drawing soldiers on a little strip of linen—such as he always carried with him for writing purposes—when a servant knocked at his door to wake him. “I will take breakfast immediately,” he answered; “give orders that the whole of the palace servants be assembled in the Hall in half an hour.”

“Every person? The cooks and gardeners?”

“Every one. Anyone missing will be treated severely.”

In a few minutes Trench was at his breakfast, which he ate without any unusual haste or loss of appetite. As soon as the meal was over he proceeded to the great Hall, where all the royal servants, in number about a hundred and twenty, were assembled. A buzz of conversation, betokening surprise, struck his ears as he crossed the Hall. Evidently the news of the conspiracy had not reached, or at least not permeated, the Palace yet. The murmur ceased as he entered the room. He walked up to the dais on which his throne stood, and while the retainers were still kneeling upon the ground, addressed them in a quiet voice.

“Listen: there is a conspiracy among the worshippers of Klastanri to kill me and all of you with me. Put on your cloaks, take swords and arrows and stand round my shrine. Let none enter the Temple till I come, but kill none without my orders.”

He left the chamber; and after a few moments' pause donned his crimson cloak, took his scourge and spear, and walked out alone in a direction straight away from the palace gates. The path presently brought him to a deep glen, at the end of which stood a high narrow edifice of white granite, decorated with red flags and surrounded by a crowd of excited devotees

The turf in front was dark and oozy with the blood of some fifty sheep that had been already slaughtered, and the officers were butchering two more when Trench appeared. As for the people round, they were wild with religious frenzy: some were dancing and leaping in the air, some cutting their arms and breasts with knives till the blood flowed in streams, and all praying, shrieking, cursing, in a confused and indistinguishable hubbub. Women and men were worshipping there alike, and even little children leaping and yelling fiendishly in the midst of all the blood. But perhaps the hottest worshipper of all was an old man too crippled to walk, sitting at the edge of the crowd, cursing zealously in a tremulous voice and hacking his arms with a long curved dagger.

Trench walked unhesitatingly into the midst of the crowd, and touched the shoulder of the chief who was conducting the sacrifice. The uproar became less frantic for a moment at this bold intrusion. "Razgu, what is this sacrifice?" asked Trench sternly.

"We are worshipping Klastanri with our fathers' rites," was the sullen rejoinder.

"Why before the day?"

"Kioung-boq has seen dreams: so have I, and that old man, and many more."

"Why have you not informed your king?"

"To you, O Mooshow, it is not given to know anything of the rites of Klastanri," answered the red-plumed Razgu with courage.

"So be it. Therefore you, Klastanri's worshippers, shall not approach the Temple of Mooshow. I will be altogether apart from your sacrifice."

The people were now absolutely still. Trench's great stature, a head higher than the tallest among them, his royal dress, his courage and air of authority, all

contributed to awe the fanatics: perhaps, too, the sudden entry of a sane man among mad had a chilling effect, which quieted the fierceness of their orgy. The unexpected turn given to the ceremony by Trench's last command, produced an absolute lull. The sacrificing chief, startled at the result of his tactics, ventured a hesitating remonstrance: "But, O my Lord, we have always. . . ."

"Silence, dog!" exclaimed the king, striking the ground with his spear. Razgu was cowed, and Trench, profiting by the impression he had produced, made his way out of the crowd, which yielded to let him pass. As he left the outermost circle of worshippers his eye fell upon the old man, who was still sitting and muttering prayers in a lower voice than before, while the blood trickled slowly down his body.

"Has this man no sons to take care of him?" asked the Autocrat of those standing by. The old devotee answered for himself.

"My sons are all dead, and all my cattle sold and my house burnt, and I am a beggar these ten years. But I have never missed a feast of Klastanri, and every limb of my body has bled for him."

"It is not right for an old man to join these feasts. Take this, and buy oxen and a house, and hire a servant to take care of you."

He threw down, as he spoke, a large ingot of gold, which he took from the pouch of his belt, and walked away without waiting for thanks. Not that he would have had much thanks: for the old man sidled along to where the gold lay, took it, and then with a curse at the enemies of Klastanri flung his crooked knife after the retreating figure of the king. His arm was feeble and the weapon fell far short of its mark, but the effect upon the crowd was instantaneous. The

shrieks and self-mutilation burst out again in a storm, the air was again burdened with curses, and the green sward drank fresh spurts of blood. Luckily the king was out of knife-range now, or stronger arms might have sent their daggers on the same quest as the old fanatic.

Trench walked slowly eastward through a thickly wooded valley, where the cries of these godless worshippers gradually died away, giving place first to the genial cawing of some large brown birds like rooks, and afterwards melting into complete silence.

The lowest basin of the valley was overgrown with rich summer vegetation, which clustered thickly round a little lake just saved from stagnancy by the sleepy brook that stole down the hillside, and discharged itself with scarcely a splash or ripple; and it was only by the straining forward of the water-lilies that you could tell in which direction it flowed. There was a path through the valley from end to end, a path which would soon perhaps be trodden by thousands of impetuous feet seeking the honour of Klastanri by insult and outrage against his rival: but now the whole dell was deserted except for the silent presence of the King, who rested for a few minutes by the water side to enjoy the last interval of peace before a great storm—perhaps the last before death. He had ceased to ponder over his plans; he had taken all the precautions he could devise and now was waiting without excitement to see the result. Only some lucky chance could give him the opportunity to send word to his friends on the mountain. There were still some hours to spare before they would be descending, and before the great outbreak was likely to occur upon the plain. The preliminary adoration of Klastanri must last yet for an hour or so,

and though a few might come severally to outrage Mooshow's shrine at any time, the general attack would not take place till the afternoon. So far Trench's mind was at rest. There was one problem he could not understand, namely the whereabouts of Kioung-boq. He had certainly found him near the palace the evening before ; but he was not among the worshippers of the morning, and apparently had made no further attempt to spread the conspiracy among the royal household. Probably, he thought, Kioung-boq had returned to the mountain. That would avert suspicion, and he could easily return in time to direct the insurrection in the afternoon.

However, Trench was not thinking of these things now : he was sitting idly by the side of the lake, watching the circles that spread through the deep blue water from the mouth of the brook, and listening to the listless whisper of the rushes. Shutting himself up in the moment without a thought of the struggle to come, he felt constrained to confine his eyes also to the narrow circuit of the lake and rushes by which he sat, and dared not look widely over the trees and hills.

Presently the fear lest the body guard round his temple might be corrupted by the conspirators without, made him rise with a sigh and continue his road towards the shrine of Mooshow. Half an hour's walk brought him to the spot,—a dell like that other dell which was now running with the blood of sacrifice. The temple was larger and of finer stone than Klastanri's, but no red flags were hanging from the spires, and the crowd that filled the sacred precincts had no devotion, no enthusiasm. They stood carelessly, their weapons in their hands, and seemed all depressed by the consciousness of an ill-

performance of their religious duty. This was Klastanri's day and none of them had danced nor bled in his honour,—nay worse, they stood in arms round his enemy's temple, to hinder the due fulfilment of the rites. They knelt, however, when Trench appeared, and continued kneeling as he passed—silently on to the interior of the temple, and sat himself in state upon the throne of the outer shrine facing the entrance. The throne was of carved wood and decorated with gold: raised high above the ground, it rendered more striking Trench's great stature and gorgeous robe. A scourge of iron and gold hung from the roof: and it seemed for a moment to the crowd without, that the hero had in all verity come in bodily form to defend his temple.

The scholar in Trench had a way of asserting itself at odd moments. It was a great relief to him now, that Mooshow's fame as a patron of wisdom was so dominant, that he was able without incongruity to call for the original slabs of slate which held the sacred writings, and pass the time in deciphering their blurred characters. About an hour had passed without interruption in this manner, when suddenly there came broken cries and a sound of running from the slope to the left. Trench, looking up, descried a small band of men running towards the temple, with all the fury of Klastanri's worship palpably written on their tossing limbs. The guards had received their orders, and called for the men to stop; those who disobeyed were seized and held still, except one youth, who, endowed by his frenzy with unusual strength, burst from his captors and rushed, foaming at the mouth and brandishing a thin long dagger, towards the door of the shrine. Savages fear madmen; and the crowd drew back to let him pass.

He ran straight towards the throne. Trench lifting his spear cried in a loud voice—"Stop or beware of the god's wrath!" then, as the youth took no notice of his command, stood up and hurled the spear. The weapon pierced his thigh, making a large flesh wound, and the boy fell. "Carry him here," said Trench to the men who stood by. The youth was brought back to sanity by the wound; and fell into an excess of terror, as he was brought to the offended sovereign, expecting new and severer punishment.

"Boy," said Trench; "it was in madness you came against the sacred place of Mooshow. Therefore has Mooshow struck you down. Yet he is merciful, and willing to heal you, that all may know his power. But it is written that Mooshow shall not heal the wounds he himself has made." He tore a square of the gold leaf off the side of one of the sacred slates and folded it. "Put this in the gash," he said. "It is sacred gold, and wrapt in it is sacred linen. Go to the Mountain Phaeira, and seek the strangers from the West. Say not a single word, but shew them your wound: they are cunning doctors and will make you whole by sunset."

The poor boy was too amazed and weakened to answer, but one of his bearers took the sheet of gold and placed it in the huge gash, from which he had just drawn out the spear. The blood flowed freely, but the attendant bandaged up the limb, and inquired if he should take the boy to the Western doctors. "Take him," said Trench; "and, to be easier, set him on an ass."

The crowd was greatly impressed by this incident. Their superstitious feelings were roused to such a pitch that nothing seemed incredible, and the might of Mooshow began to call up a species of enthusiasm

that drowned the apprehension of Klastanri's ire. An ass was procured from one of the officers of the household, who was commanding the guard, and the wounded boy conducted slowly up the path leading to Mount Phaeira. At first the guide wondered which path to take, and feared greatly that he might miss the strangers on their way down ; but luckily he saw a column of smoke half way up, and concluded that it came from the encampment of the occidental physicians. He took the path leading in that direction and drove the ass slowly up the mountain side, causing as little pain as possible to the wounded boy.

The party on the mountain had risen before daylight and climbed to the peak. The morning was wonderfully clear and the view more beautiful than they had ever imagined. Trench had provided them with a telescope, which gave them a distinct vision of the desert for an immense distance, a scene broken only by rare groups of the enormous Gobi boulders, and by two or three large encampments of Tartars, who had come nearer to the Mountain than was their wont. The travellers had come down again at a leisurely pace, exploring minor peaks upon the way, in spite of the impatience of Kioung-boq, who tried to insist on a quicker progression. Finally he suggested that he should go on in front, and get breakfast ready by the time they should reach the hut. Baj was consenting to this when Mavrones interposed : "Don't let him out of sight. I can't help thinking he has some plot on hand. I dare say he wants to steal the provisions."

"You don't mean it?" said Baj : "I think he is only over-obliging."

"Trench warned us not to trust him."

"Well, at any rate he is a nuisance, so we may as well keep him."

This was not perhaps a very intelligible argument, but it carried the day. Kioung-boq was peremptorily told to stay where he was, and the party did not get down to the hut to breakfast till about nine o'clock. They drew their water from the little stream that ran by the hut; they lit the fire, made tea, and in fact were practically at the end of the repast, when Baj suddenly stopped in the act of uniting the proverbial cup and lip:

"By Jove: here comes a dead body on a donkey!"

They turned their eyes in the direction he was looking, and saw the ass with the wounded boy climbing up the steep path, and the driver walking behind.

"What can be the matter?" said Mavrones.

The driver ran forward and prostrated himself before the two Englishmen without uttering a word. Then, leading the ass at a quicker pace up the hill, he lifted the boy to the ground and pointed to the bandage round his thigh.

"What can he mean?" said Baj to Kioung-boq; "Does he think we are doctors?"

"What do you want?" asked Kioung-boq in Sannian: but the guide interpreted Mooshow's injunctions literally, and would not utter a word. He proceeded however to undo the bandage. Mavrones bent down to render what assistance he could.

As soon as the bandage was off the blood flowed in torrents, but Mavrones caught sight of the little gold sheet, which projected slightly from the wound. He took it in his fingers and drew it out. "What can this be?" he said, holding it to Baj, who had been looking on critically, but now took the piece of gold

and wiped it on the grass. The flow of the blood was becoming gradually less violent, and the lad seemed more comfortable now that the irritating piece of gold leaf was out of the wound. Mavrones was staunching the blood with the lincn of the bandage when Baj suddenly called out. "Good God," he said, "look at this." Inside the folded sheet of gold was a small square of linen soaked in blood, but three lines of writing were clearly visible.

"Klastanri has risen : *kill* Kioung-boq and hide in the mountain."

Mavrones was dumb with astonishment, and ceased for a moment to staunch the gash. Baj turned suddenly round : "Kioung-boq !" he cried in a low voice.

That grisly-haired savage was a few yards off putting up some of the breakfast things in a basket. He turned half round, and, moved by some expression on Baj's face, stopped and hesitated for an instant ; then, quick as lightning, snatched the knife from his belt, flung it with fearful force at Baj's face, leaped like a wild beast down the mountain side, and disappeared with a shout behind the rocks. The knife, missing its mark by an inch, stuck fast in a sapling stem behind ; Baj sprang forward and Mavrones started to his feet. But the chief was gone and no sign left of him, none but the dagger quivering in the tree and the rustling of leaves in the thicket where he had passed.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WELL, we couldn't have killed him," said Mavrone, as soon as the first shock of surprise was over. "I wonder if he will really do any harm."

"All he can, for certain. You should have seen the look on his face as he flung that knife."

"Do you think we'd better get down again to the palace and help Trench?"

"No: he tells us to hide up here. He wouldn't have sent such a message if he hadn't meant it."

"If we had kept Kioung-boq safe we might have stayed—but now it's different."

"We should do more harm than good, I expect. Still we may as well try: I wish we knew where Trench was, or what was happening."

"These people can't tell us, of course," said Mavrone, looking at the Sannians. "Perhaps we might be able to see the country below from somewhere."

They looked round for a point which would command an outlook over the plain. The slopes were for the most part so thickly wooded that it was difficult to get any open view without re-ascending to the snow line. One projecting mass of rock, however, situated about two miles to the North, caught Mavrone's eye.

"We might climb to the top of that shoulder there. That ought to have a view of the palace."

"What shall we do with these Sannians? Send them away?"

"Well, I will just bandage up the boy's leg first. Then we can go off by ourselves and let them follow or not, as they like." As he spoke, Mavrone bent down to the wounded lad and wrapped his leg up again with the old bandage, which he had washed in the stream. Then, leaving his patient to lie still on the grass, he rose and followed Baj, who had already started, telescope in hand, in the direction of the jutting spit which stood out at the North side of the mountain.

Both the Sannians were sitting on the ground, bewildered at what they had seen and destitute of any plan of action. The guide had no knowledge of the conspiracy brewing below when they had started; and, for some reason or other, Kioung-boq had given him no information during the journey. Kioung-boq was generally accepted as a mystery by his compatriots, an inscrutable being of extraordinary wisdom, to be admired rather than imitated: so his example did not induce the attendants to follow his flight. The guide therefore remained where he was, waiting for orders and wondering what would happen next. As for the bearer of the wounded lad, he had been sent on a definite errand and must simply discharge his master's commands: he would wait without opening his lips till the western physicians had finished treating the boy. He condescended, however, to exchange with the guide a smile and a shrug of the shoulders, which he intended for a general comment on the eccentric behaviour of distinguished persons, as illustrated by the king, the two sages, and Kioung-boq. When the Englishmen started off to watch the events below, the bearer immediately roused himself, laid the boy again upon the ass and hurried after them. Naturally the guide and the mule followed too.

Like most of its kind, the mountain gave deceptive ideas of distance, and more than one steep valley intercepted the road to the projecting cliff. It was nearly two hours before they reached their point of view. Baj climbed up first with the telescope: Mavrones was in the act of following, when he noticed that the wounded rider upon the ass was suffering from the hurried passage over rough ground: fearing that, if he climbed up the rock, the bearer would try to make the boy climb after him, he stayed behind, laid the patient in a comfortable position on the grass slope, and remained fanning him with his hat.

"Say what you see," he called to Baj, "I am dying to know."

"There is no one near the palace," answered Baj; "but a large crowd filling an open glade in the forest outside another building that I have never seen before. It is a white place with spires and covered with gold—I suppose it must be a temple. There are about a hundred guards standing round the enclosure, and a huge crowd of people moving about in knots, all in a fury of excitement. Here are some more—about twenty men hurrying over the brow of a little hill, and rushing at the Temple: the guards have stopped them. I think there must be someone inside—the guards seem to be turning round for orders. They have let the people loose and sent them among the others. Now there are more pouring over the hill—scores of them: they are all stopped and made stand off by the guards. They don't go away though, they keep standing about in clusters. . . I wonder if it is the Temple of Klastanri: perhaps the priests are inside and Trench is sending men to drive them out. Yet it can hardly be that; the guards look like Trench's men, and the people outside seem just a mob of rioters.

Hullo, here is fresh excitement among the crowd. I can't make out why. O yes. They are all running and grovelling to a man—a Sannian—who is coming up from this direction. They are cheering, and cutting themselves with knives. He seems to be shouting and throwing up his arms like the rest. I believe it is Kioung-boq. Some one has taken off his own plume of red feathers and given it to the man. Yes: I'm certain—it *is* Kioung-boq! He has gone up to the top of a little hill: I fancy he is making a speech. They are all frightfully excited, dancing and struggling and cutting themselves with knives worse than ever. Good: the guards have made a rush at him. . . The people are beating them off—beating them easily—why the guards are hardly pretending to fight! I wonder what it can all be. . . I think the priest, or whoever he is inside, must be making a speech too: the guards are listening and getting as excited as the others. Hullo—the people are attacking them now. It is a regular battle. The guards are losing ground and the people pressing on steadily; Kioung-boq well in the rear waving a sword—Why don't the priests inside do something? The first ring of rioters is right inside the enclosure; the men inside could easily hit them with spears or arrows. Oh, the guards are turning and running! the people charging like fury: Kioung-boq shouting at the back—Good God! he's killed! . . . A spear from inside the shrine came crashing through his face and head. I could see the blood spurt from here. The people round him are falling back—No: those in front are right inside now. They are dragging someone out . . . a tall man in a crimson robe; they are tearing him to pieces—Great heavens, it's Trench!”

Mavrones groaned bitterly and leaped up the rock.

Baj went on : " Thank God, he's not killed. They are loosing hold of him now : some one is giving orders—The same man who gave Kioung-boq the plume—He has put Trench in the middle of a little knot of men. They are leading him away towards the palace. Some of them are lifting Kioung-boq's body, holding it right up in the air ; the face is crushed to a pulp, and the whole body streaming with blood. They are all jumping and tearing their hair, and making for the palace.

" Let me look," said Mavrones, and Baj handed him the glass. He gazed for a minute or two, and then said : " They are splitting into two bodies—no ; only about fifty men are breaking off and coming this way."

" After us, I take it," said Baj.

" The others are still going towards the palace : they are entering the wood. I can't see them any further."

A short silence followed, which was broken by Baj :

" We had better get into hiding, as Trench told us."

" We must get rid of the Sannians first, or they might betray us."

" Y'es : and take the provisions with us—what remains of them.—Do you know of any place to hide ?"

Mavrones had jumped down to where the attendants stood, and was ordering them by signs to go down the mountain.

" I saw a place this morning that will do capitally—just above the snow line." The guide failed to comprehend Mavrones' gesticulations, but the other man was quite satisfied. He had no doubt that the ceremony of climbing on to the rock, looking through the glass, and talking rapidly, was an incantation such as might be expected from Western sages, and

would in all probability effect a most potent cure. He now considered his business at an end, and was quite ready to take his leave. He made a low obeisance, and put the boy up again upon the ass's back. Then, seeing the guide still puzzled, he spoke a few words to him, explaining that it was time for them to go and leave the doctors alone. The guide, who had of course seen nothing of the events on the plain, took his bewilderment resignedly, made an obeisance for himself also, and followed the ass down the mountain side. Baj was undoing the mule's pack when Mavrone's interposed.

"Better keep him at present: he can carry the things up for us, part of the way."

"But we can't hide with a mule."

"We can leave him behind just above the hut . . . I'll show you the way to the place I am thinking of."

A hurried and troublesome journey led them to a spot about a quarter of a mile above their last night's encampment, where the path ceased to ascend and wound round the base of a great pile of rocks. Here they left the mule; and, taking all the provisions that were left, as well as the ice-axes and breakfast-knives to serve as weapons in case of need, they divided the burden between them. Then Mavrone's began to scale the rocks.

"You can't have seen any place up here," said Baj. "We came down another way."

"Yes: but we came down the ridge opposite, and I saw a kind of hole that will do splendidly if we can get there."

The precipitous part of the ascent was soon over, and they reached a gentle slope, covered with untrodden snow, down which a small stream, too swift to freeze, was running.

"We must walk up the stream," said Mavrones; "a track in the snow would be visible a long way off."

The water was bitingly cold. Mavrones led the way for about a quarter of an hour, never stepping out upon the bank. Their feet were numbed and scorched by the time they reached a perpendicular rock about ten feet high, over which the water fell as it ran out of a little cave. Baj, standing on Mavrones' shoulders, climbed into the hole. "It is quite dry," he said, "most of it, but rather cold." He helped Mavrones up and they peered about in the little cavern. It was narrow and low, but ran a long way into the rock, straitened down at the back to a channel just large enough to let the rivulet through. There was no possibility of attack from that side. In front the hole was hidden from almost all points of view by the corners of the ridge, and even where the mouth was visible it would be impossible to see figures within.

"You have quite a genius for irregular warfare, Mavrones; I had never noticed it in you before," said Baj, as he took off his boots and socks and tried to warm his frozen feet by rubbing. "What made you think of looking for holes to hide in, as we came down this morning?"

"Well, you remember, I was suspicious of Kioung-boq before, and was just wondering what we should do if the people attacked us, when I saw this cave. It was a wonderful piece of luck."

"We are perfectly safe, I should think, till provisions run short. But it feels a little like running away. I wonder what they are doing to Trench. They can hardly intend to kill him or else they would have done so at first."

"The Greeks will come to the rescue, I suppose, as soon as they hear about it . . ."

"At any rate, let us go down to-night as soon as it's dark, and find out what we can."

"Yes, that'll be the best thing. I suppose this party will be searching for us all the day."

"I would give anything to know about Trench," sighed Mavrones.

Poor Trench! Soon after noonday that multitude of gashed and bleeding fanatics had made their way with shouts to the palace; a small body of men were bearing the King and with difficulty holding back the furious attacks of the crowd. Trench was disarmed and badly hurt.

The first rush of assailants, who seized him at the moment that his spear pierced Kioung-boq's brain, had dashed him from his throne and trampled him under foot. He was bleeding and stunned, when his present captors had rushed in and saved him from being torn to pieces. As for the guards who had fought so feebly, most were massacred on the spot, others had fled or changed sides, and were now walking among the crowd unmolested, singing Klastanri's power. By this time Trench had returned to consciousness, and realized his safety for the time being. Not that he had much hope. True, Kioung-boq the merciless was dead; but he saw that Razgu, the chief presiding at Klastanri's sacrifice that morning, had succeeded to his command. He knew Razgu well, Kioung-boq's kinsman and follower, treacherous and implacable as he, and only left behind in courage and cunning. The bold counsel was wanting; but in all else Kioung-boq's spirit still guided the people's steps. Raising himself with difficulty

Trench looked round about him: but immediately fell back with a groan. Close behind him, borne upright in the arms of four mourners, swayed the hideous and mangled corpse of Kioung-boq.

They reached the palace, which was entirely deserted. He was carried to the large hall, whither all the mob of fanatics gathered after him. He was allowed to stand, though the guards kept a close circle round him. The crowd of his enemies was surging in the gallery, and the throne was occupied by Razgu. Trench's head swam: he felt that Razgu was haranguing the people, and exciting them more than ever. He was dimly conscious of loud yells and dark dancing figures that seemed to fill the air, and he heard distinctly a cry of "the Caves, the Caves." The meeting broke up: he was taken out into the courtyard, put into a carriage with three guards, and driven off. As the yelling and leaping figures of the palace passed away, his mind became as clear as daylight again. He realized where he was going, and what chance he had yet of deliverance. All rested now with the Greeks, if only they could arrive in time to save him before the water should rise above his head. One thing he resolutely determined: he would keep his mind firm through all, and not, like the savage who had been left there before him, be found raving when his deliverance came.

The insurgents were now sacking the palace. They rushed from room to room, plundering, tearing down sculpture and paintings, and fighting like dogs for the fragments of them. Klastanri's wild hymns and the noise of brawling mingled clamorously in the corridors, and the floors were slippery with the blood of a thousand men, who were cutting their flesh still for their hero's acceptable sacrifice. A great number had

made their way to the cellars, and were drinking underground with all the passion of savage natures. In the midst of the drinkers, seated astride a cask, was the grisly corpse of Kioung-boq, a huge gold beaker fixed in his hand. Two men sat on the ground supporting him: Kioung-boq was the idol of their worship, and now in the madness of superstition and revelry they could scarce believe him dead.

Razgu was directing the saner minds, as soon as he could call them away from the work of plunder, to a more serious quest. Kioung-boq's plan had been, immediately on seizing the King, to get possession of the great bomb, which was known to be stored in the royal treasury. Then, when once the shell was in their hands, to advance towards the frontier, and fire it into the midst of the Greek city. Then would the Greeks be brought to desolation, and become the Sannian's slaves. Kioung-boq and his followers fought not for freedom but for empire. The general principle of the bomb was known to most of the savages; two special coloured glasses were required before it could be put in use: some preparations were to be made in charging the gun, obviating any danger of an explosion before the time. The details none but Kioung-boq had managed to discover, and he had jealously hidden his information from all who might prove the rivals of his power. Razgu alone, his one kinsman and friend, had heard from him a rough description of the mechanism. If once the directions or the glasses could be found, Razgu felt secure about the rest. The first thing at any rate was to get possession of the bomb. He led his men to the treasure-chamber and ordered them to storm the door. They had begun to batter it with the pedestal of a broken statue, when a voice checked them.

"Stay : find the key of the door first, or get it from Mooshow before he drowns. The entrance is protected by a hundred spears."

It was the old man to whom Trench had given the gold ingot in the morning. Dragging himself along, he had reached the palace an hour later than the rest.

"Away, old fool !" cried Razgu, striking the man with the butt end of his spear. "Break down the door."

The savages had not caught the old man's words, or were too flushed with excitement to think of drawing back. Another and another blow of the great stone mass made the door fly open with a crash, and a shriek from some one inside rent the air. Not one shriek alone : with deadly precision the shafts flew from those enormous bows, and ten men were struck dead at the doorway before one had made his way within. The crowd recoiled in terror, and the machine ceased.

"On, on," cried Razgu. "It has stopped now :—rush in before it can begin again."

One man stepped across the threshold and instantly fell shrieking with a shaft through his body : nine other spears dashed harmlessly against the wall. The savages without held back in a horrified silence, broken only by a low laugh from the old man, and a sudden burst of brawling from those who were drinking with the dead in the vaults below. Razgu was pale with rage—"One rush will do it," he cried ; "will no one leap in and cut the strings ?"

He laid about him with his spear as he spoke, goading on the hindermost by thrusts in the back. At last the rush was made ; as soon as foot was set upon the threshold the machine began its work and six more bodies lay upon the floor, before the fore-

most man, slipping round behind the huge construction, cut the connecting cords with his knife.

The great arcs collapsed and the arrows fell. A score of men rushed into the room and struggled for the possession of the shell, which dropped from its tripod and went rolling along the floor. But who was this palsied unfortunate, found crouching in a corner, his hands over his face? Dragged out with triumphant jeers, he was brought into the presence of Razgu, who mocked and spat upon him. What should be done with this new discovery?—this white-faced thing, crawling and praying upon the ground. A hundred voices gave counsel: should he be torn to pieces, burnt at a stake, tied up in the caves with the king, cut into quarters and sent to the Greeks, stoned before the palace, flayed alive?

Razgu violently commanded order, and led the way down towards the great hall. Thither all followed, dragging the lifeless white thing down the stairs. On the floor below the gang of revellers appeared, roused from their vaults by the uproar overhead. "What has happened?" A new prisoner, one of the white-faced devils who came up from the desert; he is to be killed forthwith: all that remains is to devise tortures. . . In high glee the carousers join the other band, and lead the way to the great council-hall. Far at the back comes Razgu, flushed with bloodshed and a new sense of power. Kioung-boq is dead; Moo-show drowning under the caves; the Greeks soon to perish; and he, Razgu, king for evermore. He enters the hall. . . What is that on the royal throne, what hideous rival to his state? There sits the faceless corpse of Kioung-boq, the gold beaker still in his hand, horrible, expressionless, borne up still by the two besotted worshippers. With a loud curse Razgu darts

across the room ; he has seized the body and flung it forward upon the floor, and the two brainless wretches after it. . . Now the throne is his, he sits down and calls for silence, and glows with triumph as the clamour sinks to a loud hum. Too soon secure, he has not seen an old man stealing slowly towards the throne, a bent old man and slow upon his feet, but fierce-eyed and terrible : a pity Razgu has not seen him come, for now a crooked knife is in Razgu's heart, and Razgu shall see nor hear any more. The clamour has scarcely risen again, when the old man lifts up his voice and speaks. " There is one way—one only, to serve the new prisoner. King and courtier go together under the earth, that is the custom of ages and Klastanri's will. This creature must be sent to the caves to drown with his master. Who shall gainsay me, who have heard in those caverns the dying groans of kings, before any of you who stand about me could throw a knife ? I am old, but my enemies feel me young." He kicks Razgu's corpse as he speaks. A strong old man this, who stands red-handed over a murdered body and cares not to defend himself.

Shouts of applause ring out from all the room, but he has not ended yet. " Is it not written of old, that madmen bring good fortune to a race ? Were we not happy and powerful when the madman lived in the caverns' mouth, and cursed all who came near him ? He was a courtier sent down into the caves with his king, and left loose to grope his way in darkness. The wisest of counsellors when he went below, he came up gibbering like an ape, and more foolish than a camel. So shall this captive be : he shall be cast unbound into the darkest maze of the caverns, wait to see his master die, and climb out raving."

The clamour of applause swells up once more ; men seize that quivering and sobbing form and drag it out beyond the gate ; horses are harnessed, and another carriage drives off furiously in the trail of the first, seeking the hollow cleft among the rocks.

The old man has done his work now ; two victims more in due rite have gone to Klastanji ; he is too old to care for riot and plunder. He has slipped out unseen from the throng in the council hall, and walks wearily and often stopping for rest towards the temple of him to whom his life has been consecrated. There he is left in quiet, to sing his hymns of praise alone and brood over the deeds he has done or directed years ago.

There is no order in the Palace now. Only one chief has got possession of the bomb and hidden it away, and is now seeking vainly for the directions for firing. He prowls among the drunken and the fierce, searching every room : the men are sick with blood and riot now, and are lying listlessly about the dismantled chambers or quarrelling here and there in the corridors. There are no directions, no coloured plates to be found. Another meeting is held, less noisy and less crowded than before. "What can be done about the bomb ?" The glasses cannot be found ; there are no directions how to discharge the gun, and the Greeks will be over the frontier in a few hours. No doubt they are fighting already ; without the shell all is lost !

Four hours of riot and madness have tired the savages, and they hardly care to shout or fight any more. They are silent with consternation ; but one man gets up, a lean and grey-haired man, with his left sleeve deeply stained with blood. He knows from his father about the shell. The gun must be pointed

first, then the shell, which has a crystal window inside must be stripped of its felt, and. . . "Fool!" cry the chiefs, "who are you to know about the shell? Would you have us blow ourselves to pieces?" and the man is silent, though angry and unconvinced. . . Is there no possibility then of using the bomb, after all? Men go out to the courtyard where the cannon stands, a thing of curious workmanship, and try to master the machinery. It is all in vain; and the rebels are tired and sick at heart. There is nothing but blood around them, their own blood, not their enemies', the shedding of which has made them weak. They have lost their hero, Kioung-boq, lost even Razgu; and no one except Klastanri has gained anything. A gorgeous feast for him, but for the Sannians an evil day. Their leaders are dead; their great hope, the bomb, has proved useless, and the Greeks will be over the border to crush them down before the night. So the time drags wearily on, till a runner is seen approaching at full speed from the west.

"What news from the border?" It is scarcely good news. "Since sunrise we have waited there behind the hill top, hidden in the bushes: about the sixth hour the Greeks appeared—only a small body of cavalry galloping hard, not suspecting our ambush. We let them get close and then shot all together. They were thrown into confusion by the attack, and nearly half of them wounded; but they charged on, till the captain suddenly ordered a retreat. He had been struck, and he felt the arrows were poisoned. It was hopeless to advance against weapons which killed as they grazed; so the Greeks galloped hard away into safety. We feared at the time that they were sending to the city for archers to dislodge us, and now the archers have come. Their bows reach further

than ours, and they keep just out of range. We can scarcely hold out, for our poisoned weapons are coming to an end, and with ordinary arrows we have no chance. I have been sent to bring the bomb ; that is our only hope."

Consternation falls deeper upon all. It is a desperate danger, and none of the chiefs can give any advice. . . . Nay there are no chiefs there. Where can they have gone? Doubtless they are back again at Klastanri's shrine praying for deliverance. That was the division of the people, half to worship Klastanri and half to guard the border.

A terrible silence reigns all round, when a lean grey man with a bloody sleeve comes forward. "I can manage the bomb," he says: "bring it out into the courtyard, and I promise to discharge it aright. The chiefs were jealous and would not let me be gunner before: they would sooner have us all destroyed, than a common man surpass them in knowledge. They have taken the two glasses away and hidden them in a cellar below the stable."

"How have you learned about the bomb?" was the general cry.

"My father was there when the last was fired: he stood close by the Greek gunner and watched all he did carefully, and I have learnt about it from him. Go first and fetch the two plates of glass, and then trust to me."

The people's hope caught at this straw with enthusiasm; they would vanquish the Greeks and make slaves of them after all. A dozen men ran off at once to the cellar and searched for the indigo and orange plates. They were soon found and brought up in triumph to the improvised engineer. The men's flagging spirits were cheered again, and deafen-

ing shouts arose as the shell was laid down at the lean grey man's feet.

He evidently knew his business. First he had the cannon loaded and pointed high up in the direction of the Greek city. Then he slit the felt wrapping of the shell, while all the crowd stood still and breathless. Could he go through with it now? Yes. Two applications of light were all that was wanted, then you fired it from the gun. He took the indigo glass and held it a few seconds over the crystal of the shell. Then the orange glass. He knew that nothing remained but the firing, and was just about putting the shell into the mouth of the cannon, when his courage faltered for a moment and he stopped to pray. He stood with arms uplifted, the bloody sleeve darkly luminous in the sunlight, and prayed to Klastanri over the great shell. "O Klastanri, Lord of death, stand by us, and let us conquer without sinning against thee. The chiefs would have stolen back thy victim from the caves to make him fire the gun. And behold, Lord, I would not consent to take back thy victim and stir up thy wrath. Only help me now, and visit not on us, thy people, the sins of the chiefs." So he prayed in the midst of the people, with the shell lying bare at his feet and the red sleeve lifted against the sun.

A moment of triumph indeed for all true Klastanrites, and what of Klastanri's victim? Trench felt beyond deliverance now. His guards when they reached the entrance of the caves had fastened a clue to a stone, and proceeded down the long passages, unwinding the thread as they went. The precaution was needed, although they had a guide with them. Going continually down for an hour,

they left the large hexagonal chamber on their right and followed a series of narrow and steep passages ; leading down to a region of utter darkness, where the walls were more oozy and more pitted with holes ; the air laden with a suffocating sulphur fume ; and all the clefts and channels echoing with the howling and fury of the water. Searching the walls closely by the light of their torches, the attendants at last descried two mouldy ropes hanging from the roof. They broke at the first touch. "This is the place ;" whispered one of the savages in a tone of awe. Trench was put in front and his wrists bound with a new rope, which was then passed through what seemed to be artificial rings in the top of the cavern. He was fastened so that his feet could just with difficulty touch the earth, which was covered with water about three inches in depth. He had never spoken since he was first taken prisoner—indeed he had scarcely felt. The intense resolve not to lose his reason had remained firm, but with other thoughts his mind was scarcely occupied. He contemplated calmly all the prospects of what he would have to endure. As long as he did not give way to his imagination there would be no great physical agony. It was only the ghastly surroundings, the darkness, the sulphur and the groaning hollows, and the long suspense while the water crawled higher and higher, soft, slow, and irresistible, that gave such horror to this kind of death. The only real pain was in the racking of his wrists. It must now, he thought, be about three o'clock—he would be drowned before seven—probably by about six. It was just three hours of suffering : a man ought to be able to stand that. There was nothing really oppressive in the darkness and the loneliness : how much worse to be dying in brilliant sunlight with a hundred

Sannians to grin at one's sufferings. He had a feeling of sympathy with the darkness and the mournful waves that rose and curved and bent so tenderly towards him . . . The pain in his arms was becoming very severe: he could get no support from his feet, and all the burden of his body hung upon the wrists. The water was not yet high enough to relieve his weight: it only washed his feet to and fro, and took away the little rest he got by touching the ground. . . . He turned his thoughts forcibly away. He peered through the night into crannies where the water broke, and tried to count the waves as they washed against him. He thought of Mavrones and Baj—had Kioung-boq killed them before coming down from the mountain, or had his message reached them safely? He tried to think of other plans of sending messages; of old puzzles he had forgotten, and problems in philosophy. But the pain in his arms was excruciating now: all his nerves were racked to their uttermost, and the feeling of sympathy with Nature round him changed into violent discord.

The roaring of the waves as they rose, dinned upon his ears like the noises of Pandemonium. . . . He wondered how late it was now. The water was rising very fast—surely in two hours and a half he would be out of his misery. Two hours and a half! It seemed like years. . . . He felt now as if he had been hanging in that cave all his life—he scarcely could imagine what he should do if he were to escape—Yes: he would lie down and go to sleep without speaking to any one: sleep in a warm meadow full of sunshine—or perhaps in the valley where he had sat this morning. How strange to think he should have been so quiet and happy—and that not twenty-four hours ago. He almost smiled to find himself repeating trite

old reflections on the changefulness of life. His had been changeful more than the common. . . . Should he care much to live again? Were he offered life on condition of serving Razgu, would there be any hankering for that, rather than to be "free among the dead?" He could hardly tell; the clinging to life was there, though it grew less passionate and more speculative as death approached closer. The Greeks might possibly arrive before he was drowned: he calculated the hours carefully. It all depended on one thing: whether the rebels had guarded the border line or not. Yet they must have done so: else the Greeks would have been over by noonday before he was captured.—Why could he not have foreseen this conspiracy before? He went through the history of the last month in his mind, and many things now struck him as suspicious which he had not noticed then. Yet on the whole he could not blame himself. Certainly everything had seemed perfectly quiet: and who could have dreamed that they would hold Klastanri's feast before the day? . . . He must have pursued this line of thought for a long while, for the water was now up to his chest, and the strain upon his arms was much less. This cessation of physical pain brought a kind of happiness with it, and the irritation caused by the sulphur in his throat might now almost pass for a pleasant sensation. He felt, as it were, contented again: the water for all its wildness and roaring was warm and soft, and a languor was creeping slowly over him which made the thought of death easy and painless. A thousand thoughts came into his mind at random: thoughts of his life in England before he was a king of savages, pleasant days he had spent at college, and happy evenings at home; then he seemed again to be wandering across the desert and again

standing under the smooth beetling rock, above which he heard the clear voice and saw the earnest cloudless face of Euangelos.

There was another face behind him that he did, not see ; a white face, with lips wide open, and eyes staring helplessly towards the figure that swung to and fro in the water. Wibbling had been taken to a neighbouring gallery among the darkest and most devious depths of the labyrinth, stunned by a blow on the head, and left lying as if dead upon the watery floor. When he came to himself, the guides were gone, and his head splitting with pain. He roused himself with difficulty and tried to find his way out : he groped along for some time through the wet gallery, till suddenly he fell with a plunge into deep and troubled water. Luckily he caught the sides as he fell and was able to get out again on the land. But he realised two things :—one, that he was going all in the wrong direction, and the other that the water was rising fast and his only chance of safety was to climb up to some gallery above, as the old madman in the story had done. Sometimes in the water and sometimes out, he climbed back, along the passage, watching the roof continually, and, where it was low enough, groping with his hands. There were many pitfalls in these watereaten caverns, and at last he found a hole in the rock over his head, which seemed to communicate with another gallery above. He climbed up without difficulty, and treading cautiously for fear of holes made his way along. The water had almost filled the cave where he first was, and the noises seemed like men's voices shouting in pursuit of him, mixed with the roaring and howling of wild beasts. Trembling in every limb he crawled along, wondering if he too would come out mad, like the

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man imprisoned before him, when suddenly he came upon a sort of window in the side-wall. He looked through, and, as his eyes were now accustomed to the darkness, vaguely descried a figure swinging from ropes, washed hither and thither by the water. In the first horror of the moment he thought that his doom was now come, and this was the ghost of the old King, still swinging where he was bound, to drive to madness all who beheld him. Rooted to the spot with fear, he gazed fixedly at the bound figure. The head was hanging helplessly on the breast, and even the outlines of the body could with difficulty be made out. Yet, as he looked more closely, Wibbling felt certain it was Trench. This was a new terror: were all his friends murdered like this? Should he find their bodies one after the other swinging in the water as he made his way to the light? "Trench," he groaned, but his throat was too hoarse, and his breath too feeble. The sound he uttered did not rise above a whisper, yet he shuddered even at this shadow of his own voice. To him it seemed like a rash cry that might betray him to some unknown horrible pursuer; but Trench lost it among the noises of the water. "He is dead," muttered the shivering white lips; "quite dead." He continued crouching in the same position; the figure seemed to move: surely the head was upright now. He dared not speak. Could he leap down and undo the ropes? If he could once get Trench up above the water, he might bring him back to life. Could he venture the jump? It was ten or twelve feet down, and that white slimy water crawling at the bottom. . . . He shrank back. Yet it was a friend's life at stake: he must do it. . . . Suppose he should break his leg and die in the water? Or worse, suppose Trench was already mad, and

turned round to yell and gibber at him as he came near? He tried to cry out again, but his voice refused its office: a feeling of shame seized him, and a fear of arousing the madman who seemed so quiet now. Yet it was a worse shame to leave him thus to die; he *must* leap down: the old courtier had done it—why should not he? He came again to the edge and looked over. . . . No: he dared not, it was too horrible. The darkness, the body swinging in the ropes, head on chest, the sudden booming of the water in distant hollows, half paralyzed a brain still swimming from the blow of the mallet; the shadow of madness seemed to lurk in every crevice and pit of that impenetrable blackness; and he felt, even while he waited, the water slowly gaining upon him, and saw it washing higher on the chest of the man hanging just below. He turned his head away helplessly in an agony of fear. Just as he turned it, the water burst with a roar into a crevice below, and amid the roar he thought he heard the sound of footsteps, and the noise of wild voices crying together. He shrieked aloud and fled up the long gallery.

The shriek roused Trench, just as the water was up to his neck, and he half intended to bow his head forward and finish his life at once. "Who is there?" he shouted. But no answer came. He listened attentively, but the only sound was the plunging and moaning of that unhappy tide. It was then Trench felt his doom most bitterly: he had borne all these sufferings and terrors as a man should: yet he was to go mad after all. This imaginary shriek was the beginning. He bowed his head deliberately under the water, when suddenly there was a noise of footsteps, in the gallery above—was it a torturer or a deliverer? He could not turn to see.

"Are you alive?" cried a rude voice in Sannian.

"Yes."

"Your life is spared if you will shew us how to fire the shell against the Greeks."

"That I will never do. Go, and let me die in peace."

The answer must have been unexpected, for some quick deliberation followed in a low voice, apparently between three or four men. Then one leaped down to the lower cave, and, swimming along to the spot where Trench hung, cut the ropes and swam back again, dragging the prisoner after him. A rope-ladder was let down, and the two men climbed up to the passage; but Trench had no sooner reached the top than he fell senseless to the ground.

The next thing he remembered was lying on the earth at the mouth of the caves behind the great boulders which hid the entrance. The Sannians round him seemed to be deliberating. It struck him as curious that they were all chiefs and wore the red plume.

"Get up on that hillock and see where they are," said one. "If the people are still at the palace we can not take Mooshow there."

The man addressed climbed up to the shoulder of the rock and looked for some moments over the plain: "I can only see" he began, but no words followed; for a blaze of blinding light shot suddenly across the sky, and the air was riven with the crash of a thousand thunderclaps; the solid rocks tottered and split, and a storm of fiery dust flew high above the mountains. The watcher was lying dead upon his hill, and over him a huge mass of granite, shivered from the crag in front by the explosion of the great shell.

CHAPTER XIV.

BAJ and Mavrones had waited a long time in the cave, and their limbs were almost frozen. About two hours after reaching their place of refuge, they caught the first glimpse of their pursuers close at hand. The band of fifty men had split into a number of smaller bodies, which were exploring different parts of Mount Phaeira. A party of about ten had come in the right direction, guided by a large dark-coloured dog, used as a bloodhound by the inhabitants of the desert. Not far from the hut they found the mule grazing quietly, and soon after that the dog appeared to have discovered a satisfactory trail. The animal ran swiftly along the ascending path till it reached a pile of precipitous rocks, round which the beaten way took a curve. Here the dog paused, and seemed for some moments in doubt: then with a loud whine put up his fore paws against the rocks which he was unable to climb.

“What can that dog mean?” asked one of the men.
“They can hardly have climbed up there.”

“Why not? There are ledges: it is quite possible for a man to get up.”

“Do it yourself then: we will wait for you,” said the first speaker. The man began with a good deal of trouble to climb up the cliff: he was considerably shorter than either Mavrones or Baj, and could not reach easily from ledge to ledge. At last he got to the top, and found an unbroken stretch of snow sloping above him to a round summit. There was no trace of a footstep in any direction.

"They can't have been here," said the man, after a moment of examination. "There are no footprints on the snow."

"Perhaps it is frozen hard and doesn't shew marks," cried some one from underneath. "Try it before you come down."

"I don't think it's hard," answered the man, "but I'll try;" so saying he stepped cautiously upon the snow, and as chance would have it, fell immediately into a hole up to his neck. A burst of laughter from below greeted his misadventure. He struggled out, covered with snow all over, and, crying angrily, "I told you it was soft," proceeded to climb down again to his companions.

"Stop a moment," ejaculated one, "see if they walked up the bed of the stream."

"Go and see for yourself," grumbled the person addressed, as he stopped for a moment to shake off some of the snow that clung round him: "The stream is much too swift for any one to walk up it."

He leaped to the ground and proceeded to beat the dog, as the most suitable vent for his annoyance. "This beast is too old to be of any use now; it will go fawning on these rocks for ever unless we drag it away."

So the tracking party had passed on, lamenting their bloodhound's stupidity.

The whining of the hound and the loud conversation of the men were audible in the hollow where the two were hiding. They exchanged glances, and, grasping their axes firmly, waited for the first sign of an enemy's approach. At last the sounds had ceased, and they were again left in quiet and solitude.

It was long after this that Baj caught sight of the pursuers crossing a corner of the height opposite,

and apparently intending to descend in the other direction. He drew back quickly into the cave, and told Mavrones in a whisper what he had seen. When they looked out again after about ten minutes, there were no figures on the heights opposite them, and no sounds of human voices or feet.

Keeping themselves warm as best they could, the two friends had waited in their hiding place till nearly sundown. The mountain was, as far as they could tell, quite deserted; the bay of the bloodhound was heard no more, and no traces remained of the bloodhound's masters.

"Let us get out of this," said Baj at last: "we shall be frozen in a minute or two."

"I was just thinking, we had better go down to the plain before the darkness comes on, if we mean to find out anything about Trench."

"Certainly we must—I'll take the glass and we'll look out from the same place as before."

"Bring an axe too, in case we meet anyone," said Mavrones amiably, and the two climbed out of the cave together. They walked once more along the bed of the stream, barefooted this time, carrying their boots upon their backs. On reaching the rock at the bottom of the slope of snow, they looked round cautiously for any signs of their pursuers. Finding none, they climbed to the bottom of the rock, and sat down to dry their feet and put their boots on again. Still everything was quiet. With a feeling of complete security, and fearing only lest the sun should set before they could reach their post of outlook, they hurried quickly on. Passing by the hut on their left hand, they made their way through thick underwood to the jutting crag. Mavrones, who was a little in front, had just arrived under the shadow of

the rock when the explosion of the shell took place. The broad flash of red light, the appalling crash, and the cloud of fiery dust that followed, seemed for the moment to blind and deafen them. The earth under foot trembled sensibly; but there were more than ten miles between the palace and Mount Phaeira, so the force of the explosion was almost spent. Mavrones, being entirely covered by the boulder in front, felt nothing: but Baj, a few yards behind, was a trifle more exposed to the shock. He was flung violently on his back, and the glass in the telescope shivered to atoms.

The red dust was still spreading over the sky when he sat up and looked in amazement at Mavrones, who could only return his gaze.

"I know;" said Baj at length, "it must have been one of the Greek shells. They are bombarding the Sanni."

"No doubt that is it. But it must have taken more than one shell to make such an explosion."

"Perhaps they fired into a powder magazine."

"Perhaps the explosion set off Trench's shell too; you remember he said he had one in the palace."

"It seemed like a thousand shells one after the other, as far as noise went. . . . I am not hurt," he added, in answer to Mavrones' enquiring look.

"Let us see what the effect has been," said Mavrones, climbing up the rock. "Something fearful, I should think." He expected a terrible sight, but was not prepared for the hopeless desolation that met his eyes. Masses of rock, shattered walls, ruins of huts and cottages, were scattered indiscriminately over the plain; the earth torn up in piles and furrows, so as to blot out all trace of the landmarks of yester-

day. Where the palace had stood that morning was a great solitude; not a stone, not a tree, not a living thing. Nothing but a huge hollow scooped violently out of the earth, with heavy dust clouds settling slowly over it. Some distance off lay what might be the ruins of the building spread widely over the ground—fragmentary blocks and dust of granite, not a single wall or column or slab intact, only a waste of shapeless stone mixed with the torn branches and shattered trunks of trees, and burying who knows how many human bodies, blown to shreds and atoms indistinguishably and raining the hot ground with their blood. Mavrones could not discern from his post on the mountain any details in the work of the explosive, but the broad sweep of destruction was visible from any distance. Wherever he looked, far and wide, it was the same: a plain rent and torn by fiery energy, but almost hidden by whirling clouds of dust: here and there an irre recognizable mass of rubbish to shew where a house or a little village had once stood. There seemed no sign of a living creature, no sign that any had ever lived there: only faintly and in fitful gusts there came weak sounds of voices wailing for the ruin of all they had. Shrieks of utter panic and agony in the plain below, they were blunted and subdued by the long interval, and the wind carried up to Mount Phacira only a thin noise, as of sighing, yet with some tone about it which no mere sigh ever had, and which shuddered through Mavrones' heart as he listened. And even these survivors were only such as had stayed far away from the palace, and their dwellings were as a rule not visible from the shoulder of the hill.

One building alone seemed to be standing—the same white edifice with golden spires, round which

the battle had been waged in the morning. The thick forest which lay between the temple and the palace had acted as a defence. The fury of the explosion had uprooted and disbranched the first few rows of trees and left scarcely a leaf hanging upon the summits: but after that its force was baulked and wasted against the dense growth of underwood and the pliant branches that yielded and flew back as it passed. Only a few broken stems and boughs, and a more abundant shedding of leaves, told the story of the disaster at the other end of the forest. The trees there were for the most part sound, and the shrine of white and gold was as steadfast and untarnished as in the morning. As for the rival shrine, it was a little farther from the palace; but it so happened that in the old times when the palace was being built, certain devout Klastanrites had cut a wide avenue through the forest in that direction to serve as an approach to the Temple. The protection of the trees was destroyed and Klastanri's shrine shattered into dust. Mavrones could not fully see all this:—much less can he espy that old man who crawls uneasily among the ruins; who laughs and chatters and moans as he writhes in and out; there is no mark of hurt upon him, but his hand is pressed painfully against his forehead. Nay, never moan, old warrior; it is good luck for the Sannians to have a madman among them.

"It was a cruel thing," said Mavrones at last as he turned away, pale and solemn, from the waste that lay before him.

"Yes, they could surely have conquered the Sannians without this—I suppose it really must have been the Greeks, who fired the shell."

"Who else could have done it? Trench was a prisoner, you know."

"His partisans, if he had any—or it may have happened by accident, if the savages sacked the palace, as I suppose they did."

"Shall we go down after all? Trench must be past help now."

"Oh yes—the suspense would be too awful staying up here. . . . Only perhaps they may fire another shell."

"Scarcely, I should think—There is nothing more to destroy. We may find some wounded to attend to."

"Stay—Isn't that something moving as far as you can see to the West? It looks like an army or a large crowd."

"I see what you mean. It may be some survivors escaping. But they seem to be coming this way."

"Anyhow, let us go down as soon as we can."

Still keeping their axes in hand in case of any chance attack, they hurried down the mountain side. The sun had set before they reached the bottom, and the night was falling quickly. Thinking it safer for the present not to venture out into the centre of the plain, they skirted the eastern range of hills of which Mount Phaeira formed the southern extremity. The path they followed was little injured by the explosion, though here and there encumbered with *débris*. For an hour's time they stumbled on through the darkness: then the moon got up and the way was made easier. The horrible stillness of all the plain about was enhanced by the feeling of night, and the moonlight gave a spectral distinctness to the marks of desolation that filled all the view westward. Suddenly Mavrones stopped.

"There is a sound of people marching," he said.

Drawing back into the shadow of a rock they

looked out for some minutes in the direction of the sound. At last an immense crowd of dark Sannian figures came abruptly out of the night, hurrying on in disorder towards the mountains, yet, most unlike their usual custom, never uttering a sound. As they came near the hill where the strangers were hiding, they made a sudden change in their course, and passed northward at great speed, in a direction between the palace and the opening of the caves. The two refugees behind the rock watched breathlessly while the great multitude passed away: and then continued their doubtful journey over the broken path, following more or less in the wake of the army that had passed. After about half an hour came the sound of horses' hoofs, and a squadron of cavalry appeared slowly from the west, advancing in perfect discipline on the track of the others: the moonlight gleamed upon bright helmets and spear-blades. At length this body halted also, and after a few moments of deliberation, cantered off northwards in the direction taken by the crowd of Sannian infantry.

"They must be the Greeks," whispered Baj, as they passed away. He shouted to call them back, but apparently was not heard. The Greeks were disappearing in darkness northwards. He shouted again, and was startled to hear a groan in answer, proceeding from underneath a mass of débris. "What is that, Mavrones?" he cried. Mavrones was groping forward in the direction whence the groan proceeded. He found at last the dark figure of a Sannian crushed under some great stones, and, in all appearance, badly injured. Baj and he managed without much difficulty to move the stones away, and help the man out of his prison. The savage could stand, but his arm seemed broken, and he was greatly exhausted.

He kept repeating a few words in his own language, which unfortunately they could not understand. His gestures, however, showed that he wanted water, and Mavrones, by listening carefully, discovered a little torrent running down the hill-side a few furlongs away. He filled his hat with water, and brought it back to the wounded man, who drank freely and bathed his head. Noticing the swelling upon his arm, Mavrones dipped his handkerchief in the water and bandaged the injured part: Baj's braces were formed into a sling, and eventually the man regained a certain amount of strength. He stood up, and walked with more ease. One question was uppermost in Mavrones' mind, but he was unable to ask it directly.

"Mooshow?" he repeated to the man in a tone of interrogation.

At last the savage appeared to understand: he rose and pointed Northwards towards the entrance of the caves; and motioned his rescuers to follow him. He led the way along the path they were already taking, apparently feeling little fatigue, though the distance was considerable and the road difficult. Suddenly he stopped, and pointed out towards the plain. A company of Sannian infantry, numbering about two hundred men, had separated from the main body and were advancing towards the Mountain in their direction. Sannians are capable of gratitude, and this wounded man wished to save his preservers from his countrymen. All three crouched down among the rocks, and by groping along soon found a hollow where they were perfectly safe from observation. Baj was peering round the corner of the rock, when Mavrones touched his shoulder. "Do you recognize where we are?" he said. "This is

close by the entrance of those caves we went to yesterday." Baj took no notice of the information.

"Who is that man," he asked, "walking in the moonlight?" A solitary figure had just emerged from the shadow of the mountain and was slowly progressing towards the open plain: he was looking cautiously about him, but had not observed the straggling knot of men, who were in front of the main body, advancing silently on the other side of some stray boulders.

"He is too tall for a Sannian," said Mavrones. "Can it be Trench alive after all?"

The Sannian fugitives were within two hundred yards of the solitary wanderer; whoever he was, he was in imminent danger. Mavrones sprang out of his covert: "I'll bring him here," he said; and ran forward quickly towards the man. In two minutes he was by his side. "Trench," he whispered, "the Sannians are just across those rocks, come back with me into hiding."

Trench was worn out with the sufferings of the day. It was with difficulty that he could stand upright, or walk slowly supporting his steps with the help of a spear he had found. The sudden apparition through the night of the friend he thought dead, the whispered warning, and the shock of suddenly hearing the tramp of feet on the other side of the boulders, came upon him like a blow. He held his hand to his forehead and reeled to the earth. Mavrones, pierced with alarm, bent down and lifted him in his arms: he was beginning to retreat towards his previous hiding place, but Baj and the wounded savage were already at his side.

"Let me carry him," said Baj; and Mavrones, who was staggering under the weight of a considerably taller

man than himself, put him into the giant's arms. The wounded Sannian plucked Baj's coat, and beckoned for them to come in a new direction, pointing at the same time to a dark chasm in the rocks about fifty yards off. If there was no treachery here, the small opening in the mountain side seemed to afford a much better refuge than the boulder behind which they had been hiding before. The question was one of life and death, and trust got the better of suspicion. They followed the man towards the cleft, and at the same moment a cry from the corner of one of the blocks by which they stood, showed that the Sannian soldiers had caught sight of them. "Run for that hole, Baj," said Mavrones; "I will keep them off at the back." They set off at what speed was possible under the circumstances, the Sannian first, bearing Trench's body, and Mavrones, axe in hand, bringing up the rear. Three or four Sannian soldiers started in pursuit, but one soon outstripped the others and lunged at Mavrones with his lance just as they reached the chasm in the rocks. Leaping on one side Mavrones avoided the stroke and felled the man with a blow of his axe. They were safe in the place of refuge before the second man arrived. The entrance was narrow, and a large rock that had fallen across it prevented them recognizing at first where they were. It was the little court outside the mouth of the caves; formerly a carriage was able to enter it, but the rocks in front had been split by the explosion and fallen so as almost to block the outlet. Baj laid his helpless burden on the ground and went, axe in hand, to the entrance, where Mavrones was already standing. The savages made no attempt at first to force a passage, but after a few minutes a volley of arrows came through the doorway. Of course the two warders

were standing under cover, so they were not injured. The wounded Sannian had also dragged Trench to a safe spot. Immediately after the arrows the end of a spear was seen poking cautiously through the stony passage. In an instant Baj had grasped the head of it, and, dragging the spearman inside by a sudden wrench, clove him to the chine with his axe.

This was an end of the fighting. With a little trouble the Sannians might have climbed over the rocks and attacked the strangers from above. But chance was against them : there was a whispered cry outside, "Hellenes, Hellenes"; and the fugitive regiment continued its retreat, leaving its enemies unharmed.

Trench had now returned to consciousness, and in a few minutes the three were sitting together and filling up the blanks in each other's accounts of the day. Baj related the events of the mountain, the arrival of the message, the look out and the flight ; how near their pursuers had come ; and how they had ventured down again to the plain. Trench told of his imprisonment and deliverance, and under what circumstances he had heard the bursting of the shell. After the explosion he had again swooned, and, when his senses returned, found himself alone. The chiefs, realizing their position, had hastened off, no doubt, to surrender themselves to the Greeks. After this he had taken a long sleep under the hot sun, and was only just venturing out when his friends came up and saved him from the Sanni. The firing of the shell still remained a mystery, and neither party had any knowledge of Wibbling's fate. Trench called the wounded Sannian, and was about to ask if he knew anything of the third stranger who had come up from the desert, when a clatter of horsehoofs was heard

outside. All mounted quickly to the hill where the body of the Sannian chief still lay, crushed under the huge splinter of granite. A small detachment from the Greek cavalry, consisting of some twenty men, was galloping by : they waved their weapons from the top of the rock and shouted loudly.

The horsemen stopped : " Who calls ? " cried the leader.

" Algernon, King of the Sanni," answered Trench, " and two of his countrymen." His autocratic habits of thought remained by him unaltered.

" Have you escaped, then, son of Trench ? " asked the rider in astonishment. " Did not the shell destroy you also ? "

" I was buried in the caves, and then, being delivered, I heard the explosion before I reached the light."

" Who bound you, and who delivered ? "

" Razgu bound me, I know not who my deliverers were, but all wore red plumes, and one lies under this rock."

" Slain by the shell ? But who brought the explosion about ? Was it not you nor your friends ? "

" I know nothing of it, nor yet my countrymen." The rider, who had come close up to the rock, looked hard at Baj and Mavrones.

" Strangers," he said, " greeting to you. If you did not fire the bomb, how have you escaped from death ? You were not shut in the caves ? "

" We were up on Mount Phaeira to see the sunrise," answered Mavrones ; " there we had a message from our countryman and stayed till evening in a hollow rock for the Sanni were pursuing us. When we heard the explosion we came down."

" Who is that sitting upon the rock ? "

"A Sannian whom we found on the way buried under a mass of ruins with his arm broken. We banded his arm and took him with us."

"You are just men—I ask your pardon for suspecting you—and you," he continued speaking to the Sannian in the latter's language, "know you anything of the shell?"

"I was not at the Palace to-day, but my cousin, who worships Klastanri, was there. He had cut himself greatly with knives and bled till he was like to faint, so they brought him back to my farm, which is under the hills. He told me that the Greeks were fighting at the border, and that those at the palace were trying to find out how to fire the great shell." The man paused for want of breath; his injuries had made him very weak.

"Rest, friend, if you are tired," said the Greek. "But did he tell you anything besides?"

"Nothing but this: that there was one man there who said he knew how to fire it. But the chiefs were jealous and would not suffer him, and said he would blow them piecemeal. But the common people many of them believed in the man."

"That makes many things clear. But now, seeing your houses are destroyed, come all of you to the camp to lodge. I can entertain one, and Algernon has many friends."

"We thank you for your hospitality," said Mavrones, "but there is one thing. Do you know anything of our friend Wibbling, who was left at the palace?"

"Wibbling?" said the Greek with a painstaking pronunciation, "No, I have never heard of him. Do you know if a stranger was found in the palace?" he asked, turning to the Sannian.

"Yes, my cousin told me a white-faced man was found in the treasure chamber and sent to drown in the caves."

"I fear therefore that he is dead," said the officer, after translating the Sannian's speech. "However, we will search the caves for him at once, as far as the water will allow us."

"We must come with you," said Mavrones, though as he spoke he felt almost too tired to stand, after the hardships of the day. The Greek shook his head.

"You would not be of help to us, not knowing the ways of the caves. Besides, your eyes are all black with weariness and you must need rest."

"Yes," said Baj, "he is much too tired. I will come though."

"Nay," said the Greek, "you are as bad. You must both go off to the camp: take my horse and two of my companions'."

The Englishmen protested again, but fatigue was really making them helpless. "But will you not return with us to the camp?" said Baj eventually, "and leave the men to search in the cave?"

"Nay, friend, being commander of the regiment, I must take my share in the difficult work. That is why I was chasing the last remnant of the Sannian army when you called me."

"And is not that enough hard work for you?"

"No, I must stay to the end. You see we have been fighting or at work in some way since the hour after sunrise, and many of the men are very tired. . ."

"Is that your custom," asked Baj, "whenever there is particularly hard work, for the officers to do it?"

"How should one arrange it else?" was the captain's answer.

Well, we must be moving on," said Trench, "the night is half through already. I suppose the horses are tired?"

"No—almost fresh : they come from a second relay. Good-night, we must begin to explore the caves." Two men dismounted and gave their horses to Mavrones and Baj : Trench had already taken the captain's. The same attention was offered to the wounded Sannian, who, however, like the rest of his nation, was unable to ride, and preferred walking to the camp, which only lay a mile to the north. The pursuit of the stragglers from the Sannian army was now abandoned, and the horsemen returned leisurely to the encampment, all excepting three, who, torch in hand, descended into the caverns in search of Wibbling. Amid a general exchange of salutations, the three Englishmen rode off with the remainder of the little group, and within a few minutes were supping peacefully under the Greek canvas. All the dangers that had encompassed them were things of the past, and the revolution, that was to have subverted the Greek state and sent forth Sannian armies to conquer all Gobi and the Mongols, had been crushed in half a day. Yet melancholy clouded all their contentment at the sight of the widespread ruin surrounding them, and at the thought of the one friend missing still.

High up on the Northern ridge that night a wild white figure with bleeding feet was hurrying silently along the broken path that led towards the Lake. Trembling at every shadow that moved in the moonlight, shivering at every gust of the icy mountain wind with the sulphurous water of the caves frozen upon his garments, he groped and struggled along the narrow mountain ledge which threaded the heights at the northern bank of the river. The roar of the

waterfall made him weak with fear ; his fingers were working like separate living things, and foam was trembling at his lips. He crawls and leaps on in the shadow, fearing that less than the open moonlight ; all night long without ceasing he climbs that perilous path, till the river bend is crossed, the hills in front surmounted, and the giant sword gleams suddenly high above his head. Then, with a rush of fresh vigour, he gains the place where the stores were left at starting : he lights the signal beacon and fires the gun from a high place, and then waits half paralysed for the answer. The red light glares upon the granite and falls in strange forms among the rocky hollows ; the thick vapours that are boiling in the air, roll in dark wreaths and form round red-handed spectres that wave and beckon and melt away, as the gunshot rings and echoes among the crags. Silence comes again, and the beacon burns idly on, till at last the spectral forms fade, and the fire is dying, and the pale morning light finds only a few red embers and a helpless figure crouching behind, daring not yet to move or speak, frozen almost to death in the firelight. He cannot lift his eyes to see the broad boat that is even now coming over from the Chinese camp to rescue him, and will soon be putting to shore at the little cove : he hardly notices the cold wind, or the bleeding of his feet and head ; he does not know that his lips are foaming and his fingers moving and clutching like a man's gone mad : all he feels is the terror of that last day and night, and the gnawing remorse for a friend betrayed to die.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was not till nearly sunrise that the party in search of Wisbling returned. They had seen no trace of any living person in the caves, but, on the other hand, as far as they were able to penetrate, no body had been found upon the surface of the water. It was therefore evident that the stranger had not been bound in the caverns, and quite probable that he had made his escape to the upper air. In any case, they intended to wait till the ebb of the water, and then explore the caves thoroughly.

The news, such as it was, was told to the other Europeans when they awoke, and gave them more hope about their companion's welfare. They started early in the morning for the Greek city,—partly because they were now without house or home, and partly for political reasons. It was arranged that they should all go to Aripbron's house for lunch ; then, while the others were being shown about the city, Trench intended to consult the Elders about the fate of his kingdom, and how to repair the damage that had been done. Such Sannians as were homeless, but had not been destroyed together with their homes, had mostly found shelter in the Greek camp ; the insurgent army had dispersed during the night and most of the chiefs surrendered themselves to the clemency of the invaders. The Greek cavalry remained for the present in the Sannian country, to maintain order and to look after the distressed or wounded. Meanwhile the King and his companions were on their way to the city. ..

In spite of the wilderness of desolation through which they passed, the ride was a cheery one. The fresh morning air brisked their spirits, and produced a sanguine state of mind about the rehabilitation of the dismantled country and about the fate of their companion. It took some three hours to reach the border, which had been just out of range of the explosive power. A small body of the Sannian troops, which had been resting under cover at some distance from the battle—for the Sannians fought by relays—had been annihilated by the bomb; but the combatants had received very little direct damage. The noise of the explosion, however, combined with the trembling of the ground and the fearful havoc in the country behind them, had struck a panic into the Sannian troops. As soon as they guessed the cause of the explosion, and realised that their one defence was wasted, they fled pell-mell from the battle field and allowed the Greeks to cross the border undisturbed. The Greeks had not pursued them at first, but spent an hour or two in resting and taking care of the wounded! then a regiment of cavalry was sent on to disperse the enemy or drive him to the mountains. The larger part of the Greek army had encamped upon the border.

The scenery changed as soon as the three horsemen entered the Greek territory. At first indeed the same heathered moorland was to be seen as on the Sannian frontier, but the wildness of the country soon softened, and the road passed through rows of farms, gardens and orchards, in some of which the fruit was still hanging. The high road was planted thickly on each side with trees, many of them bearing fruit: it was a custom among these people, for those who had dwellings near the road, to plant and cultivate a

few flowers or fruit trees by the wayside, for the benefit of passers by. The road wound continually among little hills and slopes, on which pasture land had occasionally taken the place of corn fields. They were cantering leisurely down a slight slope, when an old man, who was working in a large flower garden, looked up and called to Trench. They stopped for a few moments, while Trench conversed with him, and eventually accepted the old gardener's invitation to stay for half an hour and rest. They sat down under the veranda looking over the garden, while their host brought from within, a wooden plate of fruit and some brown bread. It was about half-past ten in the morning, and the city was still twenty miles away.

The conversation was somewhat one-sided, as the Greek and his wife, who presently came out to the veranda, were full of interest in the details of the rebellion and how it was suppressed. After this, their talk naturally fell upon the strangers and the way they had managed to penetrate to these regions. The mission of Hegeias seemed to be a well-known fact in Greek history, and no one shewed surprise at the way Mavrones had discovered the existence of the colony. Their host was one of the elders, but had for the last few years abandoned active politics for gardening and the study of mineralogy. The only new topic of interest that arose was an enquiry on the part of the old senator, whether they had brought any books on the philosophy called "Christianism," of which his wife had heard something from some Chinese, who had been exiled to Ili, apparently for having professed belief in it. Algernon had indeed given them some account of the system, but, as he brought no books with him, the description was not very

full. Having assured their entertainers that they had brought several books upon the subject, which were in a large chest at the eastern end of the plateau, the Europeans set off again upon their journey, and within an hour or so more arrived in sight of the Greek city.

It was situated on the slopes of a large mountain, the tallest far of all the peaks that rose from the plateau, which sheltered the town from the fury of the West wind, and threw into bold light the whiteness of the marble buildings and the vivid colouring of those that were formed of poorer stone. For these Greeks painted their walls and friezes even more freely than their ancestors had done in Europe. The two strangers checked their horses and gazed. White and blue and red under a cloudless autumn sky, perfect in form and symmetry, and breathing with earnest simplicity like an old Greek song, temples and columned arcades were shining in the sunlight, interspersed with wide gardens and tall groves of trees. There were trees and gardens everywhere, but at the back of the city they were more closely set together, and deepened gradually up to a sombre pine forest, which shadowed the brightness underneath and set out the majestic rocky heights and dazzling snow-peaks above. One short glimpse was all they took, for Trench was riding on by himself, and they had to hasten their pace to overtake him. They put their horses in motion without passing comment on the scene, except for one question from Baj :

“Did you notice the Arches? Almost Gothic.”

Presently the road descended to a gentle valley and entered a dense and uncut forest.

“Curious,” said Mavrones, “to have a forest so near the city ; I suppose it is gradually disappearing ?”

"No—" answered Trench. "It is an old Greek institution to prevent the town spreading. It dates from the generation after Perissokles, when the people had begun to learn the shocking state of Chinese towns."

"But how do they manage about the population?"

"Oh, only a privileged minority live in the city. More than half the Greeks stay at their farms and orchards."

"How do they choose who are to live in the city?"

"There are election days once a year:—of course all the Elders have the right of living here if they like; then come the most distinguished men of any kind, and some arrangements are made about students."

"What about shops?" asked Baj.

"Well, there aren't any. Every household is supplied with food direct from the grower of it, with clothes and so on from the maker:—so that practically there are no shops."

The forest formed only a narrow belt and they soon entered the veritable city. At first there was a certain feeling of disappointment at the small size of the houses, which, however, usually stood in the midst of large grounds at some distance from the road. It was a little curious to note, besides the large trees and the occasional flower beds, a good deal of ground given up to fruits and vegetables in almost every garden. The edges of the little strips of land devoted to different growths, were generally marked by borders of the edible fern, which keeps its delicacy longer here than in the more rude climate of Thibet. The streets were

not crowded, and the inhabitants walked at a leisurely pace. Their dress consisted generally of a coloured tunic, sometimes covered with a long cloak of sober hue, which was flung over the left shoulder and fastened with a buckle. All had their heads uncovered, and a few walked with bare feet. The dress of the women was the long robe, scarcely changed from what we see on old Ionian statues. Many persons exchanged greetings with Trench, who nevertheless did not stop for conversation. The strangers rode on through the streets, which were neither straight nor broad enough to satisfy modern European tastes; for the outskirts of the town were on the slant of the hillside, and the various avenues went winding up towards the central stretch of level ground on which the public buildings and the temples stood. The streets themselves, curving among changeful gardens and houses of which scarce two were built alike, were full of freshness and charm; but all was forgotten at the moment the horsemen turned the last bend and came in full view of the agora. The central space was headed by an edifice where the Elders held their council, all white marble, sternly wrought and graced with few carvings, but shining in the sunlight and stately in the perfection of mere form. All round the enclosure where the meetings of the Assembly were held, stood statues of the great men who had arisen among the Greeks since their exile,—men old and young, and more than a score of women among them, some of the statues scarcely half a century old, while in a few the fine lines were worn and obliterated, and nothing but the gracefulness remained. It would have been a thing full of interest, to go one by one through that con-

course of ancient men renowned for goodness, standing as simply as they stood in life, to watch over the counsels of their descendants. But the eye did not rest on them ; for behind them was a brighter loveliness, marble still, but marble wrought like the tracings of an old illuminated scroll, twisting like ferns or seaweed over lintel and column, flowers and wreaths and human figures curiously intricate and hardly distinguishable from below, all chiselled with the exquisite care of Chinese ivory, and glowing with colours rich and delicate as the tints of roses and clouds and sky. These were the houses not of men but of the Gods ; all the splendour the city possessed was given up to them : and as they are " deathless and ageless all their days," so their temples were ; for the adorning of them was never finished ; but, generation after generation, new artists, the greatest of their day, were permitted, as the highest tribute to their genius, to labour at some yet neglected corner of a shrine and fix their work for immortality.

The old gods were not dead then, after all. Here were their houses still filled with life, though the Temples of Hellas had crumbled into forgetfulness. There, only the rivers and mountains and the steep Thessalian gorges where the song of the gods arose, only these were still divine with that sacredness which nothing but man and civilization can destroy. But here all the Olympians reigned once more in a mountain greater if not more beautiful than their old dwelling,—not only Zeus and the oxeyed Queen, and the two most shining, most godlike of the immortals, Pallas and Apollo ; Dionysus too had his temple, and Aphrodite, and Pan, the ill-favoured piper of sweetest songs ; even Silenus, dreamy with the inspiration of his god, and striving still to lighten the weight

of that mysterious wisdom which has made his life almost too solemn to be borne.

The horsemen had come unconsciously to a halt and the two strangers were wrapt in the wonderful loveliness of the scene ; but Trench knew the agora well, and was brooding anxiously upon his business with the Elders and on the possibility of restoring welfare to his unhappy kingdom. He waited somewhat impatiently for a few minutes, and then rode on alone towards the street where Ariphton dwelt. The others reluctantly followed, and soon had passed down a winding road at the other corner of the square, and drawn up at the entrance of Ariphton's garden. They unlatched the gate and rode up to the house, where Ariphton's daughter was already at the porch to meet them.

"My father is outside the city, O son of Trench," she said, holding out her hand ; "but come in, and I will call my brother."

"I am sorry for that ;" answered the King, who seemed to lose his royal title as soon as he crossed the Greek border, and partly dropped his autocratic manners therewith. "These are the two strangers who have been staying with me," he added, introducing Mavrones and Baj.

After a few minutes of conversation, the son of Ariphton, whose name was Amyntor, came out from his study and greeted them.

"I must go on to the Elders at once," said Trench : "but I should be much obliged if you would look after my friends till your father's return."

"With pleasure, but will you not stay to have some food ?"

Trench coloured slightly as he replied : "No, thank you ; I shall take my midday meal with the Elders."

"Anyntor," said the sister, when Trench had ridden off, "you have dishonoured the Ruler."

"Yes—I was very foolish. Algernon is maintained at the Prytaneion,"—he explained to the strangers, "and is of course proud of the privilege. It looked as if I had forgotten his rank."

After a light repast it was arranged that the two 'Ariphronidae' should take the strangers for a walk through the town and show them the interior of some of the temples. Meanwhile they would rest for an hour. Ariphron had apparently told his family of the horrible condition of the country from which Baj and Mavrones came; for the brother and sister both seemed to regard the strangers as formidable people, whose actions could not be calculated beforehand. However, familiarity soon began to breed mutual respect, and by the time they had sat for half an hour upon the couches in the veranda they were conversing like friends. The great subject of congratulation was that the Europeans had brought so many books.

"Algernon brought nothing, so we have not been able to learn much about your poets from him."

"He used to give lectures upon our literature, did he not?"

"Oh, yes; I attended them," said the sister; "but of course it was difficult for him to teach us, having no books. He wrote down on linen all the poetry he knew in any language, and translated it into Greek for us, as he went along."

"That must have been a very unsatisfactory way"

"It was. He said he wondered much at the quantity of bad poetry he knew when he tried to remember it."

"Do you learn by heart as much as the ancient Greeks did?"

"Well, even the ignorant among us know much more by heart than Algernon knew,—should you not say so, my brother?"

"Yes," said the brother, "he did not know any poet right through, as we have to do."

"You learn the whole of a poet's works?"

"Yes—Homer and Pindar and Aeschylus, that is, and of course Euathlon."

"Who is Euathlon?"

"Oh, I forgot you would not know him. He was one of those who crossed the mountains from Bactria, and died before we settled here. He is almost the greatest of all our poets."

"What did he write?"

"Lyrical songs,—mostly about the wanderings that the people went through during his life. There is a story he tells of himself in one.

"When he was a boy in Bactria, he was seized with a terrible fever, and was almost dying, when one night he had a dream: the Muses came to him and said: 'Euathlon, child of Apator, make thy choice: wilt thou live on now, a life of endless suffering, and be the greatest singer for a thousand years and the comfort of all thy countrymen; or leave this life, and be born again when thy race is established and strong, to live always happily, but without song or the love of the Muses?' And he said: 'Song is better than happiness: I will live in sorrow if the Muses make my words sweet.' Then he began to recover from his fever; but while he was still weak the wanderings began, and never ceased till he was dead. All his life through he was afflicted more than any of the Greeks of those days, but all the camp used to come round

his tent in the evening to hear his songs; and they are still cherished by all of us, and written in gold letters inside his shrine."

There was silence for a few moments. Baj broke it by saying "Humph!"

"What a strange story," added Mavrones, "have you any of his books?"

"Oh, yes! Everybody has them. We will lend you ours to copy out."

"Thank you very much, I wonder if we shall be able to appreciate the poems—from ignorance of the language, I mean."

"I should think you would," said the sister. "Algernon very soon did; but then he wrote poetry himself in ancient Greek—very beautifully."

"Ah, Mavrones is a great verse writer too," said Baj. "He ought to copy you out some of his translations."

"You, also, O stranger? Then, by Apollo, let us see them!"

"I shall be very pleased," said Mavrones; "I never expected before to turn my Greek verses to such practical use."

At this moment a horse drew up at the gate and Amyntor went out to see what was the matter. He returned with Trench, who still wore an anxious expression.

"The elders wish to see both of you without delay," he said, addressing Mavrones and Baj. "Perhaps you will shew them the way, Amyntor," he added; "I feel rather tired."

The distance was not great, so Amyntor conducted them without further ado out of the garden, and, after a few minutes' walk, brought them to the centre of the great square, where the office of the Elders stood. It was a circular building, with a round flight

of steps leading up to the principal doorway. Amyntor led the way through the outer porch to a door of some dark wood, which seemed handsomely carved, though they had not time to examine the work. When their guide knocked once at the door, it opened spontaneously, and let them pass into a square chamber where some ten grey haired men were sitting.

"Greeting, O Elders," said Amyntor: "these are the strangers whom the son of Trench says you desired to see."

"Yes:—we asked him to make known our wish. Thank you for leading them here, Amyntor;" said one of the old councillors, rising to greet the strangers; he was perhaps the head of the little council, though nothing in his dress distinguished him from the others. Two couches were placed for the reception of Mavrones and Baj, and after a brief salutation Amyntor withdrew.

"Strangers," said the same Elder who had addressed them at first, "I fear our words will not be pleasing to you; but being councillors we must before all things carry out the laws. It has been decreed, from the time our fathers first settled upon this mountain, that no foreigners should be suffered to live in our country. The law has never been transgressed but once, when Algernon the Briton was taken in: him we received believing he was a Hellen, and afterwards would have cast him out. But he had brought us great benefits, and laboured much to find us; so he was suffered to abide here on the condition that he should entirely join our race, and never return, nor send messengers to his native land. Even then, there were many offended at his stay, saying that the law was in spirit broken, and that the manners

of a strange and evil people could bring no good, but rather corruption. And saying this they almost convinced the Elders, but Algernon was beloved by many of the citizens, and so he was not cast out. After this came the rebellion of the Sanni, and then Algernon was made king, being thought a just and firm ruler for barbarous men, and more like to them in his manners than the Hellenes are. So the law was once broken; but when Algernon departed to rule the Sannians, the Elders assembling themselves resolved that no more foreigners should be taken in upon any plea to share our citizenship, and, if any should again reach our country, he should be sent back straightway on the road he came."

The old man stopped, and the two strangers looked at one another in dismay.

"But will you not let us stay even for a day or two?" said Mavrones at last:—"we have come a long way, and brought you many things that are beyond price to people in exile far from their country."

"We are not exiles now; nevertheless, seeing you have, as Algernon says, brought us the poems and histories of our race in Europe after we were taken captive, we must hold you in great honour for that, and give you presents to take back to your people, whatever you most desire."

"But you will still send us away? I am a Hellen and therefore your countryman."

"Therefore we have thought fit to loosen the law for your sake, O stranger; if you will, you may stay here all your life, and become in truth our fellow-citizen. This is the only condition; you must never leave our country again, nor hold communication with your kinsmen in Europe. . . You, however," he

added, turning to Baj, "being no Hellen, must still depart."

Mavrone's sat without speaking; the choice before him assumed an importance he could scarcely face. From the moment he had deciphered the first few lines of the MS. at Arganthus, the search for this exiled nation had become a life-quest for him, and he had followed it with a superstitious devotion. Everything had favoured him so far; he had reached the goal with almost miraculous good fortune, and what he had found was precious beyond all his hopes. The men and women, like Greeks of old in beauty and simpleness, so calm and cloudless and thoughtful in such a perfect life; not one wicked or miserable face among them. The city seemed like no city else upon earth, and the art, in the glimpses he had caught of it, matchless amid all the art he knew. It was lying before him now, a prize seeming almost more precious than man could win, and he only longed for the time when so much fairness should sink through his eyes into his soul . . . and now it was all to be taken away. . . The light from the window struck him, and he saw outside the wonderful frieze upon the temple of Apollo; the stately gentle youths and maidens sculptured there seemed to call him to stay among them and be like a god among a divine race; and the glamour of the fretted marble above dazzled his eyes and charmed his spirit, till the longing to stay became too strong to bear. All the men and women he had seen among the Greeks rose before him, and seemed enjoining him to stay. They were so stately and earnest, and full of greatness like the heroes of old Hellas come back to earth; clear eyes and noble voices amidst an air that seemed to have no evil in it. . . Then in a painful difference the

alternative came into his consciousness—exaggerated and blackened by the contrast; hideous cries and envious faces of grown people and children in European streets, weak creatures struggling for life, brawling crowds abroad and the secret wrong of high places; and above the waste of indistinguishable suffering, came the dulness of riches and the sad aimlessness of ordinary life, and all the sounds of misery and hardheartedness mingling like the whirr of a great dead engine working to unknown ends in darkness. His heart sank as he answered sadly: "I cannot leave my father and my kinsmen, nor let my friend be driven away alone. I will go back when you bid me."

The old man was speaking again, but Mavrones hardly heard him, and did not follow the meaning of his words, till at length he found himself going again to the door, and with a mechanical salutation passed out into the corridor.

"That was very good of you, Mavrones," said Baj, as they walked out towards the portico.

"What did he say afterwards?"

"Oh, we have five days respite to see things in, and then we are to go back to the Chinese escort."

"Five days are something," said Mavrones.

They wended their way back to Aripbron's house, where they found the news of their approaching departure already known. Trench had been informed by the Elders of their decision, and had purposely shunned being present at the interview in which the foreigners were to learn their fate. On the other hand, he had gone round with Aripbron's daughter to several of their friends, in order to make up a collection of books and small works of art, for the strangers to take back with them as the results of their journey.

He returned soon after Mavrones and Baj to their host's veranda, and arranged for Amyntor and his sister to take the two strangers round the principal temples, and explain the history of the things they saw. He, not unnaturally, considered it rather a nuisance to go sight-seeing with two people more or less like himself, whose comments would have no particular interest for him, however original, they might appear to the Greeks. Besides he had his state affairs still to think over.

The others set off again to the central square—the Place of the Gods, it was called—and examined diligently one temple after another, with all the zeal of New York tourists who have only one day in Rome. As their stay was now so straitly limited, every hour was precious, and every detail graved itself minutely on the minds of the two strangers. The conversation was scanty and turned chiefly on explanations of the pictures, or accounts of the religious ceremonies indicated by particular symbols.

“Have you kept your religion quite unchanged then?” asked Mavrones as they came out of a Temple of Artemis.

“The forms, I fancy, are not greatly changed since we first came here, but the spirit has grown in some way.”

“Your ancestors kept up their native traditions during the Wandering?”

“Yes. Before they started from Bactria there was a general assembly, and the priests that were there wrote full descriptions of the rites of the temples they had left in Hellas. When our fathers built the city here, they followed out all the directions.”

“How do you mean that your religion has changed in spirit?”

"Why," said Amyntor laughing, "I thought that was your favourite idea in Europe—evolution of belief?"

"Well, so it is. But give me instances."

"Well, of course anthropomorphism has long ago disappeared, except as a symbol."

"A symbol of what?"

"Of some likeness of men to gods,—for we consider that a man's sense of moral good is like a god's mind."

"Yes," said Mavronces, "I see. It is a closely disputed point with us. But do you still believe in polytheism?"

"In many gods? Yes;—surely all the world shows that there are many."

"The Buddhists have not influenced you then?"

"The Lamas have come here sometimes and camped on the plain underneath, and our priests used to go down and talk with them about the gods. . . This is the Asclepieion;" added Amyntor, as they approached the steps of another temple.

"Does then Asclepios have his house among the higher gods?"

"Yes:—he is greatly honoured, and sick persons are brought here for the physicians to tend them. My father used to be one of the priests."

So saying, they entered the precincts, and the conversation turned again to the architecture, the wall-paintings, and the arrangements for treating the sick. Most of the afternoon was spent in the Place of the Gods; then, as the sun was about to set, they walked up a path leading to the pine forest on the mountain, and refreshed their brains by the cool air of the mountain side. Cheered and invigorated they returned to Ariphton's house, where their host himself met them. He had heard of the Elders' decree, but would

endeavour to the best of his power to let them see as much as possible of the Greek country during their five days' stay. He would, especially, collect from his friends gifts that would be interesting to a European. His daughter upon this was anxious to contribute a copy of Euathlon's poems, which she had copied out together with the music. It seemed a selfish thing to Mavrones to accept as gifts, books which had cost so much trouble to copy out; but the idea of buying or selling was out of the question, and it was with a grateful and happy heart that he thanked the Greeks for their kindness and solicitude.

He was walking indoors from the veranda, when a messenger appeared at the garden gate, and, running across the lawn, put a letter into Mavrones' hands. He opened it with interest and read:—

"To Mavrones the European, the Elders of the Greeks in Gobi.

"Greeting.

"Having learned from men watching on the Mountain, that the robbers of Gobi, joined with many thousand Tartars, have heard the explosion of the bomb, and are making ready to attack us in great strength, we have decreed to ring all the plateau round with a chain of dynamitis, that none may touch the rocks, but he be slain. Therefore you and your companion must leave the land of the Greeks and Sanni before noon to-morrow; for after that time no man will be able to pass the border for many days. In return for the gifts you have left for us at the Eastern border of the Sanni, we give you great thanks; we have arranged that certain books and jewels and relics of our history shall be waiting for you at the temple of Justice by the next sunrise, and with them a guide, to

conduct you down to the plain and set you in the direction of the Chinese who have escorted you hither.

“Messengers from the land of the Sanni say your friend, having escaped from the caverns, has been traced to the Eastern boundary near the sword. If he is found by to-morrow, he will be sent straightway to the Chinese camp.

“The Gods prosper your voyage home, and grant you contentment with what you have seen of the Hellenes in Gobi.”

CHAPTER XV.

ACCORDING to the Elder's command, the strangers were to leave the city immediately after sunrise, in order that the guide might have time to take them to the Chinese encampment and return by about noon, when the circle of dynamitis was to be put round the whole table-land. The Kolo, or brigands of the desert, had been seen in large troops mustering on some isolated heights to the north-east, and an attack was expected early in the afternoon. Ariphton had obtained an interview with the Elders and tried to relax the stringency of their decision, but he had only gained one concession; the strangers might stay three hours after sunrise in the city, if they undertook to find their own way to the camp from the first point where the Chinese Standard was visible. The guide would then be back by noon, and the dynamitis set working as soon as possible;—it was always a difficult thing to arrange, Ariphton said, and the circle might not be completed till late in the night. In that case of course they would have to repel the attacks of the Kolo in the ordinary way.

Accordingly, rising with the sun, the travellers spent their three hours in further rambles through the picturesque avenues of the city, returning about seven to take a farewell gaze at the Place of the Gods. The guide and the packs were awaiting them; there was no leisure to open the latter now, but they found that Ariphton had managed to add various curios and MSS. of his own, or such as he had collected from his

friends, to the store the Elders had made of precious things for the strangers to take with them. The Englishmen had little to requite Ariphton's kindness with; however, Mavrones left him his watch, a kind of curiosity to the Greeks, who reckon time in a different way, by small self-adjusting sun-dials.

About eight o'clock the little caravan was ascending the slopes of the great mountain at the back of the city. In front rode a guide, leading two horses laden with packs and shod with large leathern shoes to protect their hoofs from the sharp stones of the desert. Behind came six men mounted upon horses, Mavrones, Baj, Trench, Ariphton and his son, and lastly, Euangelos, who had come on purpose to see Trench's countrymen before they departed. As far as the outskirts of the city they had been accompanied by Ariphton's daughter and one or two of his guests, whom they had met the evening before. Now, however, they had passed well into the pine forest and were still ascending the mountain towards the snow.

"How is it that we go up the mountain when we are intending to get down to the desert?" asked Baj of Euangelos.

"It is one of the easiest ways down. The best of all is by the Northern cliffs, but we cannot go in that direction because of the Kolo."

In a few minutes they entered what appeared a natural archway in the mountain, and went rapidly down-hill by a sort of tunnel. Shafts had been cut from above into the gallery to let in the daylight, and the way was broad and easy, though somewhat steep. After a descent occupying an hour and a half, they found themselves on level ground and in the daylight, but encompassed by large rocks in a way that made egress seem impossible. By following the guide,

however, and threading several devious and narrow passages, they at length emerged into the open desert. Extending in front of them in all directions were immense stretches of curious-coloured gravel, the green and red transparent pebbles forming a dull mass when taken in miles together. Behind them the enormous cliffs of the plateau rose sheer and precipitous for nearly a thousand feet, one great block of mountainous stone, surmounted again by the snow slopes and gleaming crags of ice. Looking back over the way they had come, they found that at a few yards distance it was impossible to discern any trace of the mazy gallery that had led them out. No one who was not thoroughly familiar with the locality could find his way into the table-land.

As they had now passed the border of the Greek country, Trench and his friends prepared to turn back. The parting was brief; the Greeks of course could not be much affected, but Mavrones was very sad, and Trench seemed to feel the loss of his countrymen more than anyone, himself included, had supposed possible.

"I almost wish I was returning with you," he had said to Mavrones as they rode through the pine forest that morning.

"Why don't you? You would like to see your people again."

"I don't care much for my people: and I should find it intolerable to live as a private person in England," said the king. "But I do feel a kind of home-sickness at times."

"You might well come—it is only a question of going. . . ."

"No—I have promised to stay on here; besides, I feel pledged to do something for the Sanni. I can't

go away just after this horrible affair. . . . It would seem cowardly."

"I suppose you do owe a duty to the Sanni," said Mavrones. "Have you any plan for the future, or will you go on just as usual?"

"Well, I am thinking of giving up my religious imposture, though I don't know if it would be possible, now."

"I suppose the Klastanrites are crushed for the present?"

"I think they are; it was an extraordinary piece of good fortune that my temple was left unharmed, while Klastanri's was brought to ruins. That is what made me inclined to keep up my pretensions to divinity:—but I think my wife will object."

"Your wife?"

"Oh, haven't I mentioned it? I am engaged to Aripbron's daughter."

Here some interruption occurred which broke the conversation short, but at a later stage in the journey Trench came up to Mavrones once more.

"By the way," he said, "when I have finished my book I intend to send it to England to be published. Will you see it through the press?"

"I shall be very glad to do so: but aren't you going to publish it here?"

"Yes certainly. I shall publish it here as well: but I think it is more likely to take in England. However you can perhaps manage to let me know the effect it produces."

"Easily; I will send back your messenger with the news—whom do you mean to send? Not a Greek?"

"Oh, no; I couldn't do that. Probably a Chinaman: I should like to take it over myself, after all."

These were the last words Mavrones heard from

"the king, except a brief farewell at the end of the subterranean gallery.

Trench's voice was a little husky when he said "Good-bye," and gave Mavrones a small linen roll containing letters to some of his friends in England. This despatch was really an infringement of the law, but on minor points the Elders had shown themselves compliant.

One other incident occurred as they took leave of their host. "Strangers," said Ariphron "it is well always to obey the Elders' commands, and every man is better in his own country. Nevertheless, though it is a long journey, you may live to come to the city again; it may be we shall send word to those in Peking to bring you here."

"What good will it be to come again, if we are only to be driven out like this?" said Mavrones.

"Men alter in many ways, and the Elders will be different in ten years; or we may call the people and make changes in the Law."

"Could not that have been done this time?" said Baj.

"No, my son; for this is a time of danger, and the city is soon to be attacked. In such seasons the Elders alone take council and the people obey."

"Is there really any hope?" said Mavrones abruptly.

"Why not, my son? At least there is hope, if you come again, that you will stay longer than now."

Mavrones paused for a few minutes, the prospect of returning when the Elders were of more liberal mood, or the people able to decide about his stay, had never occurred to him.

"Do not think we are ungrateful, my father," he said at last; "the hope you give us is very precious,

and if the Gods allow I will come again. If not, your city shall always be honoured in our remembrance, and the name of Ariphron most chiefly of all your fellow-citizens."

Five minutes after, the escorting friends had disappeared behind the maze of stones, and Mavrones, Baj, and the guide were left alone in the desert. Before pushing on, the last named blocked the passage by an artificial stone door, in such a way as to make the inlet quite invisible from the desert without, and scarcely noticeable even by one who had come some distance in the right direction under the rocks.

"Is that to prevent foreigners from getting in by the tunnel?" asked Baj as they moved onwards. "I should have thought it could be broken down at a pinch."

"It serves also to carry the line of dynamitis round the outer barrier of rocks," answered the guide, "so as to complete the circle."

"Do you often use this dynamitis, then?"

"Pretty often."

"What if any Greeks happen to be out of the country? Can they tell by looking whether there is dynamitis in the rocks?"

"They throw grass or sticks at the rocks before touching them, to see if the force is there We must push on, or I shall keep those who prepare the dynamitis waiting."

They cantered on, following roughly the line of the plateau all eastwards, for the Chinese camp presumably lay beyond the Eastern extremity of the table land near the lake, and they had descended from the heights at the south-west corner.

"I suppose there are other ways down from the plateau, besides this?" observed Baj after a few minutes.

"Three others—besides the one at the end of the lake, where you came up. I expect your friend will have come down that way."

"Oh, Wibbling, I suppose he will." Baj felt quite ashamed to think how little they had missed Wibbling, or even thought about him, since once they had heard of his escape from the caves. "Of course that will save him a good distance in getting to the Chinese camp?"

"Quite four hundred furlongs,—nearly the whole length of the plateau. The Chinese are encamped in a valley to the South of the Lake, quite close to the Eastern end of the Sanni country."

"So we have four hundred furlongs to go to-day before we reach the Chinese?"

"Altogether it is rather more than that from the city to the camp: but we have come nearly two hundred already; I shall soon have to turn back. We can see the tents from a rock a little way on, and then you can't miss your way."

In half an hour they rounded a corner of jutting stones, and the guide, dismounting, climbed a tall boulder that stood by itself upon the plain.

"There it is," he said, "you can see the Yellow Dragon waving from the top of the large tent."

The others had climbed up the boulder too, and with difficulty made out in the distance what seemed like the apex of a tent with a yellow standard floating from it.

"There it is," said Baj, "but how did you know exactly where the Chinese would be?"

"O, they always camp in that valley. Besides I was in the Sanni country a few days ago, and saw some of them catching a camel outside; and a Sannian refugee told me he had seen them looking

about the day before yesterday, a little after the explosion."

"Then you can see the valley from where the sword is?"

"Not quite where the sword is, but a little south of the sword:—in fact all along the southern heights about there . . . You can find your way now—there are provisions in the bay horse's pack. You had better make straight for that clump of stones in front—from there on you can see the camp all the way."

"Thanks," said Baj, "we can't make a mistake—Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Mavrones, who had not spoken for the last half-hour, answering the wave of the guide's hand. A minute afterwards, the Greek was galloping back to the place where they had descended, and the two Englishmen cantering along the plain in the direction of the group of erratic boulders. The way was quite easy, even if the boulders had not been there to direct them, they need only have followed on the sides of the plateau to arrive within two miles of the valley. The route the guide indicated was much more level and a little shorter; that was the only reason why it was generally preferred. They continued their journey in a downcast mood for a couple of hours, which brought them to the group of stones. They dismounted and prepared to rest under the shadow of a tall rock, having first assured themselves that their direction was right and that the dragon standard was still in view. Having taken no regular meal since sunrise, they were very hungry, and did full justice to the food that was lying uppermost in the bay horse's pack. It was very hot in the sun, though Autumn was now well advanced, and they rested some time after lunch, enjoying the shade and

"looking at some of the MSS. in the pack they had opened. The treasure they carried was quite beyond their expectation; it seemed as if they had got the works of every Greek writer since the exile, neatly written on linen scrolls and rolled into convenient packages. The characters were almost as small as in English printing, but so clearly formed as to be easily legible. It was impossible even to glance at all the contents of one package during the short time they could afford to spend in resting. About half-past three they started again with a little more than twelve miles before them. They talked more gaily now; the sight of the MSS. had made them realise what they gained and almost forget what they had lost.

The tent with the flag flying was now the directing point of their ride. Only the extreme summit was visible at first, but of course that was quite enough to guide them, and in the sultry weather they rode on leisurely. In a couple of hours nearly the whole tent was visible, though, as it happened, none of the Chinese were moving about outside. However, the camp was situated in the dip of an abrupt ravine—a kind of miserable oasis in this desert—which wound in and out a good deal and was here and there blocked with great boulders.

No doubt the Chinese were hidden by some corner of the gully. They pushed on and shouted to their old escort; and then, receiving no answer, led their horses down the steep incline and explored the bottom of the valley. The one tent which they had seen was standing high up on the slope with the banner waving from the obtuse peak of it. The grass was burnt away here and there, shewing where the Chinese had lit their fires; there were marks of old tent-pegs and

trenches in the ground where the tents had been; hard by, a few old sacks and heaps of rubbish. The tracks of horses' and camels' feet were still fresh, but there was no sign of a human being in the valley or in the desert beyond. The Chinese had gone.

Baj and Mavrones looked at each other in dismay: "What are we to do?" said the former at length.

"Either go after the Chinese as quick as we can, or else ride back to the plateau before the dynamitis is round the rocks."

"Do you think there is any chance of catching the Chinese? They may have gone days ago."

"The guide said they were here the day before yesterday. I wonder what has happened." They waited for some minutes trying to guess the explanation of the escort's disappearance. Suddenly Mavrones spoke again: "I have an idea; Wibbling was to be sent on here this morning; he had fifty miles start of us, you remember. I expect he has come here and the Chinese have gone off with him, thinking we are not coming back."

"But he would have told them?"

"He couldn't speak Chinese."

"Why did they leave the tent?"

"That is just what struck me. They have moved it higher up the slope. I can't help thinking they must have heard about the brigands and left their tent in a conspicuous place to make it look as if they were still here."

"I believe you must be right. If Wibbling was sent down this morning, they must be about thirty miles ahead of us now."

"They go slowly, we could catch them in a day."

"If we knew the way accurately. But we might be hopelessly lost in the desert if we made a mistake"

"Let us first go back to the plateau at any rate. The Sannian end is only a mile or two off. Everything depends on being before the dynamitis."

They vaulted into their saddles and rode at full gallop towards the plateau. The wind, which was just getting up from the west, blew coldly in their faces and drove the sand at times into their eyes.

There was no scalable point except that where they had first ascended the rocks, and to get there involved crossing nearly a mile of water without a boat. Baj was a magnificent swimmer, and Mavrones could manage more than half a mile if occasion called: their plan was first to test the rocks to see if the dynamitis was yet at work; and then, if they found it was not, to swim across to the little cave and climb up the same staircase of rocks which had first led them to the plateau. As they came near, they looked anxiously to see if there was anything new in the appearance of the mountain side to betoken the presence of the mysterious force. But no; there was no change whatever in the towering grey walls, or the mean shrubs that grew here and there on the ledges. The dynamitis could hardly be already in activity. "It seems all right," said Baj, "what did the guide say about throwing grass?"

"I think he said you could tell about the force somehow by throwing sticks or dry grass. . . Let us try, anyhow."

Baj picked a turf of the coarse "Goats' Beard" that grew here and there in bunches among the stones, and threw it against the wall of the plateau. The grass was caught by the wind and blown against the rock; then it fluttered slowly to the ground.

"That can't mean any harm," said Mavrones, and touched the rocks with his hand

"Thank God; we can get back still," cried Baj.

Tying their horses to a tree, both men proceeded to strip off their clothes, and dive into the lake.

The water was warm; and seemed lighter than that of ordinary pools, which made swimming a little more difficult; the short choppy waves gave some trouble also. But the greatest obstacle that met them was the acrid sulphur fume which rose very quickly upon the surface of the whitish liquid through which they made their way. In forty minutes Baj reached the beach, and was going to climb up at once when Mavrones called to him: "There is just a chance the dynamitis may be going by this time: throw a piece of grass against the rock."

"I don't see any grass," said Baj. "It is not likely. . . Oh, yes, here's a bit." So saying he plucked the grass and flung it against the rock. It cracked loudly and shot out a number of sparks. The meaning was only too clear: the ring of the dynamitis had been completed while they were swimming across, and now to touch the rocks was to die.

The long swim had exhausted them both, coming as it did at the end of a tiring day. They sat upon the sand and shivered in the wind which curled sharply round the edge of the plateau. Mavrones at last got up and walked towards the mountain-wall.

"It is all over with us now," he said: "but I mean to climb up and risk it."

"Mavrones, don't be a fool," cried Baj jumping up and catching hold of him. "There's no risk about it—it's certain death."

Mavrones looked at him stupidly: "Well, what else can we do? I can't swim back . . . and if we did we should be no better off."

"I can easily help you back. I am not a bit tired and can shove you on if you float. Come on, let us start before we are too cold."

"When we are there, we can't do anything."

"We can afford to rest to-night. To-morrow we can go after the Chinese—we are sure to see the tracks, and can go twice as fast as they do."

Mavroneſ sat down dejectedly upon the ſand: "I am ſure I can't ſwim back, and I ſhould only drown you if I tried. Let me go and get an electric ſhock, and then you go on after the Chinese. The provisions will laſt you longer."

"Now you are talking nonſenſe, Mav. Come on, get into the water."

Mavroneſ with a dreary ſmile got up and dived into the lake. "Don't wait for me in any caſe," he ſaid; "let me get over ſlowly."

They were both chilled by ſitting wet in the wind that blew round the corner of the mountain, and Mavroneſ' arms were numbed by the cold and fatigue. The ſhore looked ſuch an enormous diſtance off, and each ſtroke ſeemed to bring him ſuch a little way forward, compared with the effort it coſt. The ſulphur fumes were riſing continually into their mouths and eyes, and the wind, to which they ſoon became fully expoſed, caught each ſeveral wave as it roſe and ſent the creſt of it flying in a ſhower of bitter ſpray that half blinded a ſwimmer at every couple of ſtrokes.

Even Baj was ſwimming ſlower than when they croſſed the lake before, and ſeemed frozen and exhausted when he reached the bank. He ſtood ready, however, to help Mavroneſ if need ſhould come. The latter laboured on; his ſtrength was far inferior to that of Baj, and, though he ſwam in good ſtyle and kept his

lips level with the water, he was almost dead with fatigue before the crossing was accomplished. At last he stood safely on the land ; the swim back had taken him an hour.

They dried themselves hastily with their coats and handkerchiefs, and then proceeded to dress. Outside the protection of the rocks, they felt the full violence of the chill desert wind, blowing unchecked from the great mountain chains that cross Asia from the Indus northwards.

It was now about eight o'clock and the sun was down ; there was no warmth anywhere to compensate the bitterness of the gale. Their teeth were chattering and their limbs shivering with cold when they mounted again and rode for the valley where the Chinese camp ought to have been. The sand whirled after them in clouds, and small sharp pebbles raised by the wind cut their necks and hands till blood came. Luckily, the wind was behind their back, and no snow was falling yet, though the contrast from the great heat of the day made the cold almost unbearable. The horses, pricked by the stinging of the sand and gravel, galloped hard for the gully. As they descended the steep sides they got a little shelter, though the sand still poured down over the edge of the plain and whirled in clouds across the ravine. They picked a difficult way down the rocky incline, and at last settled in a hollow formed by three great masses of stone, where neither the wind nor the sand could reach them. They tied their horses in a place where there was a little grass ; and, wrapping themselves in what clothes they had, lay down to rest under the shelter of the rocks. There was no chance of finding firewood—the valley was a wonder of fertility in producing enough grass for a horse to eat. The

search for fuel of any kind was difficult, as all the ground was thickly covered with sand. At last however, as the cold was intolerable without a fire, they ventured out into the storm and groped among the relics of the Chinese camp. The search was indifferently successful, but they managed at last to get up a dingy fire which served to keep off the intense rigour of the cold. They made a scanty supper off the remains of the provisions they had brought from the Greeks, leaving enough for breakfast in the morning to support them in their pursuit of the Chinese. Still hungry and pierced through and through with the cold, hearing the long howl of the wind and the rattling of the sand and pebbles against the neighbouring rocks, they at length lay down to sleep in the desert. They had practically no provisions whatever to meet the requirements of a long journey; but they did not at all expect the journey would be long. They had only to rise early next morning and travel due East, after the Chinese, who, after all, had less than a day's start and could be quickly overtaken by one forced march.

So they slept quietly enough, not knowing of the signal that had been given three nights before, nor of the figure that had crouched behind the fire on the Eastern rocks of the Sanni: they had not seen the boat land, and the Chinese scale the rocks and carry Wibbling down; nor heard him crying that all his companions were dead and that they must all fly for life away from that accursed mountain. His words were in a meaningless tongue, but that timid convoy readily interpreted his lamentations and signs. Startled by the terrific explosion, they had watched anxiously for the result; their scouts had seen the mustering of the Kolo and the troupes of Tartar

brigands passing Northwards along the Western horizon ; and now the escape of one terrified and wounded man when three had gone in good strength ; only five days before, had made their worst fears a certainty. Leaving their largest tent with flying standard, to make the robbers fancy they were still in camp, and dropping the cumbersome part of their baggage, they had fled homewards with all the prodigious speed of a Chinese retreat, expecting every hour to see the strange warriors of the mountain hurrying upon their track. Their camels were strained to their utmost powers, and more than one had been left with bleeding feet to starve in the desert, while their masters hurried on frantically to a safe retreat. By this time they were two hundred miles away, resting at an armed station on the route to Ili, and spreading terrified reports of a gigantic invasion from all the Western tribes, led by the nation of sorcerers who dwell on the mountain of the Sword. And the two Englishmen were sleeping in the valley just sheltered from the wildness of a desert storm ; and next morning they will gallop hard to the Eastward, almost foodless, and with no tent to cover them, over a wide waste, where sand and dust have hopelessly covered every footmark made more than an hour ago.

CHAPTER. XVI.

IT was a miserable night that Baj and Mavrones spent in the deserted valley. The terrible fatigues of the day, ending in a swim of nearly two miles, made them long for rest ; but the crushing disappointment they had undergone, the danger of the morrow, the gnawings of hunger, and the cruel beating of the storm, had broken their sleep constantly and made their dreams horrible. At half past three in the morning each found the other lying awake. The sand was still blowing in clouds and the night still black ; but their teeth were chattering with the cold, and their limbs stiff and painful ; the fire was out, and all chance of sleep seemed to have gone with it. They had lain still for a long time, when Baj could stand it no longer.

"Mavrones," he whispered, "are you awake?"

"Yes—I've been awake ever so long, but I thought you were asleep."

"I'm frozen ; let us start at once."

"Very well. Anything is better than lying here."

"I wish to God we could get warm."

"Let us get into the Lake again : it will warm us for the time, though it may make us worse afterwards."

They ran down to the lake—the nearest point was only half a mile away,—and got a little external heat about their bodies, which drove away the helpless frozen feeling which had clung to them during the latter part of the night. They dressed quickly and

went back to the valley to breakfast. The provisions the Greeks had given them were intended to form one liberal lunch, and now they were about to take their third meal from it. Only some half dozen figs and *lychees* were left, besides a little barley bread; and when that was gone they must either find the Chinese or starve. Mavrones emptied the little roll, and divided the provisions equally. Three dried figs, four *lychees*, a piece of barley-cake and half a pear, or something like a pear, constituted the breakfast of each.

"Is it wise to eat it all at once?" said Mavrones, doubtfully.

"Eat it all; and then ride till we find them," was Baj's decisive reply.

"We shall get frightfully hungry before night."

"We'll catch them by ~~three~~ ^{ten} o'clock; unless they go much faster than they came."

Mavrones looked rather doubtful.

"Anyhow we can't start without food now," said Baj again.

"I expect you are right. There is no danger of overeating in any case."

They began slowly to finish the last fragments of their provisions. Every morsel was precious; they could stave off their hunger now, but the next hunger would perhaps be the death of them. They ate slowly in the dim dawning light, like children in a nursery, comparing their progress. After a few minutes passed in silence, Mavrones jumped up:

"By Jove," he said, "there may be some provisions left in the tent; we didn't examine it carefully last night."

"Not likely. They would never have left anything to eat."

“ Well, let us try at any rate. We can almost see by this time.”

The sun had just risen over the desert, and the darkness was dispelled. There were no clouds to form bright margins of light, or colour the rays that came slanting from the East. The faint yellow lines had grown gradually on the horizon and thickened into a continuous region of light. Then appeared a thin segment of the fiery disc: then, it seemed, came a jerk or two, and the sun was up and shining, and all the graciousness of dawn had vanished. Sunrise and sunset must be beautiful everywhere; but if their charm could ever fail, it would be on a cloudless day in the desert.

The two friends searched the interior of the deserted tent, groping among old boxes and leathern sacks, and various cooking utensils, which had been thought too cumbersome to carry back. There was only one find, but that was beyond price:—half a small brick of Tartar tea lying on the ground in a corner, which had apparently been forgotten in the haste of packing. Tartar tea is an uninviting beverage at the best, even when it is made under the most favourable circumstances and has a layer of butter floating on the top. This half brick was covered with dust, and there was no milk to take away the bitterness of it. Nevertheless, no discovery could have pleased the travellers more. They lit another fire and boiled water—to be sure it was taken from the Lake half a mile off, and smelt strongly of sulphur, but what of that? That tea made them at last thoroughly warm, and gave freshness to their jaded nerves. When breakfast was over, and the last piece of barley cake consumed, they took two leather water-vessels that were left outside the tent, and, after filling them with the remainder of

the tea, saddled their horses and took them to the lake to drink. The water was to ordinary tastes disgusting, but the horses seemed to like it particularly,—or else, perhaps, they knew they were in the desert and might have long to wait before coming to water once more. They drank freely; and seemed unexhausted by the long ride of yesterday. By half past four the little caravan was in motion, Baj and Mavrones with their flasks of tea, each mounted on one horse and leading another, which carried the treasures of the Greeks. They were climbing slowly up the steep side of the valley, expecting to find the Chinese tracks when they reached the level desert at the top. After that, their only chance of safety lay in hard riding, so they had no mind to be slothful on any ground; but a spur was given to their speed by an unexpected danger.

The Kolo, baffled in their attack upon the North-West corner, had begun to reconnoitre the whole extent of the table-land. A party had explored the Southern side during the night in the hope of finding some pass by which to enter without touching the outer circle of rock, which had proved fatal to many in their evening onslaught. This party had rested before dawn about two miles off the valley, under the southern spur of the mountain; the bottom of the valley was not visible there, nor did they make out the yellow dragon at the tent-head till after the sun was up.

"Tsong-Kaba! What is that?" cried the man who saw it first.

"A Chinese flag—let us go after them."

"We can kill Chinese any time. Let us wait till we've had some tea."

"They may slip off:"—suggested an active Thibetan—"let us get them first and make them cook our breakfast. We can kill them afterwards."

"Perhaps they know how to get up the mountain—they must be an embassy to the Wizards."

"Well, I'm off at once," said a stolid young Tartar, and walked out of the tent to where his horse was tied, ready saddled as always, and prepared for a gallop at any moment.

He took his long lance and swung his gun over his shoulder, after loading it carelessly with a handful of home-made gunpowder and a couple of pebbles. He waddled to his horse,—for constant riding had made him as bow-legged as most of his neighbours,—jumped to the saddle, and in a moment was flying at a terrific speed over the desert, holding his head low down upon his horse's neck and uttering ferocious shouts in its ear. Some dozen of his companions more or less at random followed him; and when Baj and Mavrones, who heard the shouts just as they were reaching the top of the slope, looked round to see what the noise meant, they saw a band of mounted spear-men galloping straight towards them. The first feeling was relief: any human face in that waste must be the sign of a friend; but a moment's glance told who their pursuers were. There would be no mercy among the Kolo; and there was no chance of fighting them successfully,—two against fifteen, unarmed against armed. The Greek horses seemed to realise the situation first: they turned their heads for one glance and then sprang into a gallop across the plain just as the first Tartar raised his gun and fired.

Home-made gunpowder is, like many other home-made articles, more a credit to the maker than a satisfaction to the consumer. The gun burst, and the stones fell harmlessly: the only result of the shot was that the foremost Tartar's horse took fright, and stumbled against a rock at the valley's edge, contriving

to upset thereby the second rider who was close behind. The others were quickly on the spot: but between them and the objects of their chase lay a rugged and steep valley down which not even a Tartar could ride at full speed. They drew rein, and proceeded cautiously down the side, picking their way among little rocks and drifts of soft sand. The way up was easier but still too steep to do anything but walk; and by the time they reached the level ground again, the pursued had a good half hour to their credit and were galloping hard five miles away.

"There are only two of them," said one man, "I shall stay and see what there is in the tent."

Most of the Kolo followed this move and went back to plunder the empty tent and return disappointed to their breakfast. Six however still continued the pursuit. A Tartar never ~~rides~~ but he gallops; and now the hunting instinct was aroused. A man who satisfies the wild beast in him by hunting foxes or hares, will despise that game when he comes to shoot an elephant or a lion. And a true sportsman will think meanly even of the king of beasts, when he gets a chance of hunting and shooting his fellow men. There are no sportsmen so lucky as Charles IX, unless it be some few slave hunters in the good old times, or dilettante Arab-shooters of to-day.

The Tartars had all their sluggish blood boiling with excitement, as they bent upon their horses' necks and urged them to frantic speed by shouts and whispers. It seemed scarcely a natural horse that flew so wildly without spur or scourge, nor a natural rider that bent so low and muttered and yelled, and waved his long lance with its hanging noose as he swept after his human prey.

Baj was a good rider, and Mavrones a capital one.

The race was straight and level and there was no limit to be seen. The Greek horses were a finer breed than the Tartar animals, or even than the trained and toughened coursers of the Kolo. Still, their riders had not the magic of the Tartars to make a horse fly swifter than the wind; and the leathern shoes which protected their hoofs from the hard stones of the desert, made their pace slower and their footing less sure. The Mongols only use these shoes for camels, whose feet are worn to the quick in a day or two of Gobi travelling, even on the borders of the desert or the caravan routes, where the road is beaten smooth. The Kolo had camels with them, but all were left in the camp: the reconnaissance had started upon horses only.

The sun was well up now, and the wind which had blown in gusts, now this way and now that, had begun to sink. There was no cloud in the sky and no movement in the desert, not a living thing nor a sound anywhere, only the flying and the pursuers, horses and men bathed in sweat, and quivering with excitement; shouts and yells behind and in front a high-strained silence, broken only by the quick breathing of the men and the padded hoof-beat of the horses. Once only Baj had spoken since the chase began: "They are gaining," he said, as he looked round for an instant, and urged on his horse by blows of hand and foot. It was true: they were gaining, though gaining slowly. Before the end of the first hour they were a mile nearer, and by the end of the second scarcely two miles off. The day was yet absolutely quiet, not a cloud, not a breath of wind: but the ground was more rugged and the stones rougher than before. There were hills and valleys too, where the way was difficult and dangerous. But the Tartars galloped through

. . .

almost any ground, and the Englishmen had to do the same for very life. They let their horses go, and the horses picked a path through holes and stones with scarcely an abatement of their speed.

Still the Tartars were gaining, gaining faster than at the beginning of the day. Once the second horse of the pursuers put its foot in a hole, and flung its rider senseless on his head among the stones. But this was only one of the regular accidents of desert riding, and the others passed on with a careless glance. The ground still continued rugged and dangerous, and the natives gained fast. They were less than a mile off now,—at least the nearest man was, for one was about two hundred yards in front of the rest. Then came straight country again, stonier perhaps and sharper than before, but still level, where the less skilled riders could get on with better success. The Tartars gained more slowly here, but gained nevertheless. The first man was riding more furiously than ever: he left the others a long way behind, and came almost nearer to his enemies than his friends. He was yelping like a dog with the fierceness of the chase; his long lance was already out at arm's length, and the lasso already waving in the air, ready to fling round Baj's head in another couple of minutes: when suddenly something seemed to have gone wrong. He was no longer gaining much upon the Englishmen: a minute more and he was losing ground; the horse had begun to limp. He shouted furiously, but the animal could not quicken his pace. He lagged in his stride, and dropped into a canter. With a volley of curses the man stopped short; unslung his gun, took deliberate aim, fired, and missed. As bowmen the Tartars are unsurpassed, but five hundred years have not made them good shots with a gun; or perhaps

their prowess has declined in this as in all other things since the times of Timour or Tchengis Khan.

The foremost rider dismounted and looked at his horse's foot :—it was quite lame, and cut badly with a sharp stone. There was no question now of continuing the chase, it was only doubtful whether he could get home again. They had been riding for four hours at full speed and the horse was exhausted as well as lame.

The others were soon at his side. "Stop:" he shouted ; "my horse is lame."

They had taken no notice of the man who had been flung upon his head ; but this was a different thing. The chances were that all their horses would be lame soon, as they were tired already. The slight delay had already given the fugitives an advantage, and they were galloping still with no sign of lameness. The leathern pads did good service in the end.

A Tartar with a lame horse is helpless and miserable. The Kolo realised this, and would not risk any further hunting. They dismounted to give their horses rest and stood together in a group, talking angrily about their ill luck, and the uneaten breakfast which was waiting for them nearly forty miles away : then mounted again in despondent spirits and rode quietly homewards.

For some time after their pursuers had halted, Mavrones and Baj continued to canter on in the same direction. For one thing they suspected a ruse, and besides their business was to find the Chinese, not simply to escape from Kolo. The chase had lasted four hours as far as they could guess, and the day was still scarcely begun. The robbers had so far done them good service, that they made them clear a good deal more ground in the time than they could possibly

have done otherwise, but the horses were terribly exhausted, and could scarcely be expected to go on much further without a rest. When the fugitives first drew rein, the horses' energy seemed to have left them: they had galloped well hitherto while the excitement of the race was on them; but once stopped, it was the work of the world to set them on again. After a struggle, they consented to break into a tired and heavy canter. It was cruel work to force the beasts on in such a state of sweat and panting; but a rest in the bare desert with no shade or grass, would be almost worse than no rest: it was better to keep going on the chance of finding some gully, where possibly there might be grass to eat, or, at the worst, a little shade under the rocks. One means of refreshment was in their power. Baj untied his vessel of cold tea and moistened his lips. He handed it on to Mavrones, who took some also. Then they dismounted and gave their horses a scanty sip. Bare brick tea, cold, with sulphur in it, can at times be a liquor beyond price.

They cantered on, fortified by the tea, for an hour or more, still over the same stony herbless ground. The weather was as hot now as it had been cold during the night. The wind had sunk soon after day-break, and probably would not rise again till dark. Meantime the sun was scorching the cloudless sky, and the air quivered here and there with faint and blurred mirages. The worst thing of all was what both felt but neither cared to speak of; the hurry of their first flight had made them start somewhat at random, without searching for any stray marks of the Chinese caravan's passage, which might be still uncovered by the dust, and without even making sure of their direction. They might be riding towards

almost any quarter between North East and due South.

The chance of reaching the caravan was therefore very much diminished. Still, if they came within twenty miles of it in any direction they would be able probably to make it out. If not;—supposing they did actually pass by their own caravan without noticing it, there was still a possibility of meeting other caravans, or reaching some Chinese settlement beyond the borders of Tartary, where they could appeal to a Mandarin. The chance of this was small indeed. In their journey to the Greek plateau, they had been more than a week in the desert, without seeing a single town. Still they ventured to hope that this was because the escort had intentionally avoided towns, and not because there actually were none.

Meantime the horses are going slower and slower and that which carries Baj has ceased to sweat. That is a bad sign and dangerous, and they are inclined to lay themselves down on the bare scorched gravel and try to rest. But the place they are in now seems drier and hotter than any they have passed yet, and far ahead they can see something which looks like a break in the level ground. It may be a dozen miles off,—still it is worth trying to get there. Baj dismounts, and saddles one of the pack horses. They have had less to carry and are fresher than the others, if any of this drooping band can be called even comparatively fresh. The other pack horse carries two packs instead of one, and Baj's exhausted animal is left to follow at his leisure. The pace has sunk to a walk now, broken occasionally by short and unwilling spurts. For a moment a great hope comes into the travellers' hearts: a large animal, like a black sheep grazing, appears a hundred yards off upon the plain.

Can there be a sheep or a shepherd here? No—the thing waits till they are close by, then rushes along the ground to gain impetus, and rises on strong wings into the air. It is the huge eagle of the desert. Never hunted or shot, these birds sit motionless upon the ground till the time comes to look for prey: then they fly high and watch for a caravan or a cluster of Tartar or Turcoman tents, and fall upon any stray edibles in the midst of human beings. This bird uttered a dismal cry, and flew on over the little caravan, waiting for food.

An hour goes by and the rising on the plain seems no nearer; though the heat is more pitiless than ever it was. Now Mavrones' horse is beginning to give way. It has ceased to sweat, and its tongue is lolling from its mouth. However, the horses seem now to have espied the broken heights on the plain in front, and are straining all that remains of their strength to reach them. The next five miles are passed at a fair pace, but after that the poor brutes can do no more. They may long to reach the shade, but their limbs can hardly carry them the necessary distance. At last, the two men dismount, divide the packs again, and set off on foot towards the accumulation of rocks. It is still two miles or more away and looks different now from its first appearance. The rocks seem strangely regular, yet not clear cut, and on the walls where the sunshine beats, you would almost think there was luxuriant grass, were not that impossible in Gobi. The travellers are too worn out to discuss it, too worn out even to be able to think. They can only plod mechanically on, each leading a horse that is as tired as he. The other two horses are following of themselves, and the enormous eagle still hanging in the air.

The distance is covered somehow, and they find

themselves near the group of rocks. Only they are not rocks now. They look like steep grassy slopes, built to enclose a square; the over-grown walls of a city, with gates let in in the centre of each. As one looks closer, he sees crenellated ramparts, and turrets built for cannon. Inside the ways are choked with sand, and grass grows thickly where there is shelter from the wind and cold. The walls without still stand high above the plain, but within the piled sand has covered even the roofs of houses: only occasional depressions in the sandy slopes seem to show where streets and market-places once were, and perhaps that one huge mound may be the site of an ancient Temple of Buddha, or a settlement of Lamas. In one place, the sand has slipped—not long ago it seems—and left the wall and the roof of a house almost bare. The skeleton of the city is standing intact. The houses may have been ravaged—that cannot be seen—but no conqueror has shaken the walls, which are now bolstered with sand and over-grown with coarse grass for three quarters of their height. It has only taken five hundred years to founder these cities in the desert waves; a short time to destroy almost the sole material record of the vastest empire the world has ever seen.

It is only six hundred years since that multitude of strong fighters moved forth from the Khalkas and Ordos to subdue or slay all who dared await their onset. On the East side they reached the sea and stayed, only marching north and south to root out all their enemies and to seat their leader on the throne of the Celestial Empire. But to the Westward, over the immense desert, over the terrific mountains of North Thibet, they spread their rule and left desolation behind them: then over the Himalayas to

vanquish India, over the great ranges of Central Asia and Afghanistan to found a capital, Samarcand, among nations who had never heard their name: then a brief pause to rout the conquering Turks, and then further marches over the steppes of Chorasnia, over the Ural country and the Crimea, right across Russia to the Polish border: there five thousand miles from its starting point, their conquering power wavered and stopped; and the Tartars dwindled gradually, through many years, from the kings of the world to a nation of rude and scattered villagers. But in the Eastern Empire, after a century of domination, a different end came, sudden and fierce itself as a Tartar onset.

On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, half a thousand years ago, millions of small inscribed papers, rolled in the presentation cakes of the Moon-Feast were sent round secretly to bid all the Chinese rise and slay their Tartar conquerors. Nearly every household had its billet of Tartar soldiers; and in every household upon the feast night they were massacred to a man. The Tartar army was annihilated, and the Mongols who lived in the great cities of the Land of Grass, fled one and all before the avenging march of the native Emperor Young-Lo. The Tartar nation, never closely united, was split into fragments and destroyed; and it seems as if the land they lived in had shared their ruin. Whatever the soil was long ago the ruined cities now stand in an uninhabitable desert; some, nearer to the confines of human life, are used by shepherds for feeding-grounds, some are too far away in the wilderness for even a Tartar shepherd to visit them. A Tartar race sits again upon the Imperial throne, but the Mantchous are swallowed up by the conquered

Chinese. The descendants of Timour and Tchengis have almost forgotten their past. Only a few great names, a few desolate and grass grown cities, the plains of Asia ruined and depopulated, the mountains thronged with cowed and homeless nations of unknown speech or history, hundreds in the Thian-Shan and Himalayas, hundreds more in the Ural, the Caucasus, and even the Carpathians—these are what still remain, scattered and piteous records of the widest triumph of human fighting power.

Mavrones and Baj unsaddled the horses, and after another drink at their sulphurous tea, lay down to rest under the shadow of the city wall. They were suffering a good deal from hunger, but as there was nothing more appetising than grass within fifty miles of them, had to content themselves with sleep instead of food. The time must have been a little past two and the sun was at its hottest. An hour or so might well be spent in resting, as the horses could not possibly go on in the heat of the day, and they themselves had barely slept the previous night. Lying on their backs in the shade they were soon asleep, dreaming, no doubt, of safe living and friends and food, and all the things they wanted most and had least hopes of getting. The horses lay down and rolled and ate the grass, and lay down again and browsed still lying, and enjoyed themselves greatly during that few hours' stay in the deserted city of the Tartars. The great eagle, stationary on the city wall, stood sentinel over the sleepers.

Perhaps it was imprudent to go to sleep at a time when so much depended upon haste, seeing that, when once asleep, a tired man cannot wake at will. Baj had arranged himself with elaborate care in a position such that the sun would shine on his face and

wake him in about two hours ; an excellent plan, which only failed because, when he felt the sun in his face, he just shifted his head, without waking, into the shade. When Mavrones eventually roused himself, he found with consternation that it was near sundown. He called to Baj to get up, and in a few minutes, they had saddled the horses and were off. After all, perhaps the extra hour or two had not been wasted ; they felt a good deal more vigorous for their rest, and the horses went admirably.

Before starting they had climbed up the city wall, to look for traces of the Chinese caravan, and while riding they kept a sharp watch in every direction. When the sun had set, their search would be if anything easier. If the Chinese made their camp fire outside the tent, it would serve as a beacon : if inside and with closed doors, the result would be much the same, as in that case the tent itself would shine by night like a large Chinese lantern.

They rode on over just the same kind of country as they had covered before reaching the buried town — hard, herbless and stony, undulating a good deal and occasionally broken in, jagged gullies. The sun went down just as it had risen ; and the wind sprang up as it had done the night before. The extreme cold seemed to return with a rush, and dust clouds full of sharp pebbles rolled along and leaped in the gale. The cloaks which had been discarded during the day were again put in requisition, and small use they were against such a biting chill. For the first hour after sunset the wind hesitated in what quarter to blow. The sand came now in the travellers' face and eyes, now veered to the north and took them sideways, and sometimes whirled in ascending columns where adverse gusts met. Gradually, how-

ever, the other currents of wind were merged in a prevailing North Westerly—a great good luck to the men who were riding away from it. Such a wind in their faces would have blinded them or made it impossible to go on.

Just as the twilight was deepening into actual darkness Baj uttered an exclamation: "The eagle has gone," he said between his chattering teeth; "perhaps it prefers its food hot."

Mavrones looked up, but the bird was no longer to be seen floating above the sand clouds, and the flapping noise of the enormous wings had ceased.

"That must be a good sign. It has got wind of something to eat, I expect."

"You think it means we are near some settlement? I fancied the bird had just given us up as a bad job from the feeding point of view, and was trying to get out of the storm."

"It may be either, I suppose," said Mavrones drearily.

They cantered on, letting the horses pick their way through the darkness—a difficult business because of the holes and burrows. The same feeling of helpless inactivity came over them, which they had experienced the night before. Every limb seemed numb with cold; their legs were stiffened in one position across the saddle, and the hand that held the reins was like a block of stone. It was painful to move, every shift of position made the biting of the frost more real: and to crown all came the pangs of hunger. Perhaps the hunger tormented them less now than in the morning. Then they were ravenous and would have given anything for a beef steak: but as the time went on, the desire for food seemed to pass away into a sheer weakness, which had now grown.

again to a wringing pain. They could scarcely have eaten anything even if they had the opportunity. All they did was to break the ice upon their tea, which they had almost exhausted before leaving the deserted town, and share with their horses the last mouthfuls of the freezing liquor. More chilled than refreshed, they flung away the flasks and rode on desperately, with no food or drink left, with no purpose but to ride constantly forwards till they or their horses died of cold or famine. The horses' chance was the better. They had eaten well that day and might come again to a grass plot.

For hours they rode on without speaking a word. It was nearly midnight when Baj turned suddenly: "Is that a light?" he said, pointing southwards. There seemed a faint glimmer upon the flat ground a mile or two away:—only a vague luminousness in the atmosphere, no fire and no shape of a tent.

"I think it's nothing," said Mavrones; "but let us go in that direction if you like. It is as good as any other."

Baj pulled his right rein and they rode southward. The horses seemed to have noticed the faint brilliance in the air; they pricked their ears and went with more spirit . . . As they stopped to look at the light a faint and confused sound of music seemed to float across the desert to their ears. Faint and confused at the first, it sank gradually and appeared to die completely away as they waited and listened. They soon came within a mile of the spot; but still no tent, no definite appearance came into view; nor did the music sound again.

"Perhaps it is a sudden gully," said Baj. "There may be a tent at the bottom, which we can't see."

He was right. A few minutes after he had spoken a red glare of fire-light burst suddenly from the spot, and shewed the rugged edges of a valley, like that in which the Chinese had camped—a red glare followed by yells and shouts in a piercing uproar, like the warcry of an army of savages. Then in the midst of all the blaze and tumult, some score of strange figures, black in the red light, with hair and robes flying, were seen hurrying up to the level ground and rushing in circles round the edge of the little gorge. They all leaped and shouted and beat the air with spears, and two of them in the middle carried a huge flaming mass shaped like a man and scattering shreds of fire broadcast.

The two travellers stopped in amazement. The horses took fright at the din, and had begun to start away when the flaming effigy appeared. The fire, as often happens, terrified them so completely that they dared not move. The poor animals stood still and shivered with staring eyes. A few minutes, and the dancing figures caught sight of our two travellers. One man stopped suddenly in his race, looked, pointed at the strangers, and then rushed down the valley with a shriek. His companions, turning their eyes in the direction where he had pointed, saw the same scene, and the procession broke up in dismay. The effigy dropped to the ground, and the men fled, one or two only daring to fling their spears at the two immovable horsemen.

There were two tents at the bottom of the gully; both had fires, though one was quite empty otherwise. In the other, three Lamas, clad in the yellow robe and cap, red sash and red vest, were sitting round the fire and chanting in a low voice. A sick man lay upon a bed in the corner. The priestly hymns were

interrupted by the sudden appearance of the first *black man*.*

"Lord Lama, Lord Lama," he cried, "come out and save us! There are two more devils waiting in the desert!"

"What do you mean, black man? Are you drunk?"

"Come and see, then . . . two devils on horses, come right out of the desert."

"They are not a bit afraid of the fire or the shouting," cried another. "They stood quite still looking at us."

"They are dressed like devils, not like men"

"They never spoke a word . . ."

"They have spare horses with them to carry away our devil when he is cast out!"

This was a breach of privilege. When a devil has to be cast out of a sick person, it naturally wants a horse to ride away. But this horse must always be given to the Lamas who conduct the exorcism and who know exactly how to arrange for each particular fiend's likings. If the devils themselves are going to provide the horses, what is to become of the Lama-series? The chief Lama got up at once: "Shew me where the devils are," he said; "you two follow me."

The three Lamas went out, a crowd of laymen preceding them, to that part of the valley above which the devils had been seen. They were preparing to mount the slope, when, to everybody's consternation, the figures of two horsemen appeared on the crest. The "black men" drew back; the Lamas stood their ground firmly and breathed a prayer. The chief of them held his hands up in the air and pronounced an

* i.e. layman; one who does not shave his head like a priest.

exorcism in a loud and angry voice. The men behind handled their weapons nervously, and waited for an authoritative word to shoot.

Mavrones and Baj, puzzled and somewhat alarmed at this reception, waited until the incantation was over, and then proceeded to advance down the hill. They had not the foggiest notion what all these odd sights and sounds might mean, nor what ceremony was going on, nor why it was interrupted. They had not understood a word of the Lama's incantation, which was in the Thibetan language, nor a word of the exclamations of the men about him. They had however mastered a little Mongol during the voyage to China, and Mavrones luckily bethought him of a sentence in his conversation book.

"All men are brothers," he remarked in a diffident tone, as he came slowly down the hill among the spears and muskets. The old Lama drew back a little way and watched him narrowly; but no other notice was taken of this statement.

"All men are brothers;" he repeated in a firmer tone.

"That is very true, stranger," said the Lama; "and a noble sentiment besides. You are evidently a person of education."

CHAPTER XVII.

IT is interesting to reflect that there are some countries in the world where a man's intellect is measured by the nobleness of his sentiments. The Abbé Huc gained a reputation at Lhasa for almost superhuman knowledge, because he said it was a bad speculation to gain the whole world and lose your own soul. Such a view of life has its drawbacks: Joseph Surface might have been a sage in Thibet; but it would be a splendid purgatory for youthful cynics.

Mavrones' cosmopolitan good will, perfunctory as it was, instantly convinced the chief Lama that he was not conversing with the devil: though he still remained in doubt, who in the world could come in an absolutely unknown dress on horseback at the dead of night out of the most desolate and unknown regions of Gobi. There was certainly a spice of the satanic in the conduct of these two strange beings, and the Lama felt a certain suspicion mingling with his natural hospitality. The lay portion of the little caravan, following the lead of their ghostly fathers, put back their weapons and waited for an explanation. The slight conversation which had taken place between the old Lama and Mavrones had been unintelligible to them; they were Dchiahours and knew no Mongol.

Baj and Mavrones came down the hillside and dismounted in the middle of the encampment; at a sign from one of the priests a boy tied up their horses and

took the travellers into the nearer tent. It was empty except for a large fire and a sort of bed, intended for the reception of the sick man, when the devils had been successfully cast out of him. The rite of exorcism had of course been interrupted, and it was out of the question to continue it now: so the invalid and his friends remained for the time being *in statu quo*. The senior Lama, who felt the responsibility of the position on his own shoulders, came across in a few minutes to the tent where the strangers were, bringing a great pot of tea and announcing the approach of boiled mutton. He found the guests lying side by side on the ground, with their heads on the rugs which were to have formed the sick-bed. They sat up when they saw him, and invited him by signs to be seated.

Before he assented, it was necessary to offer the strangers tea, which he did by simply holding out his hand. Mongols, Dchiahours, Thibetans, and all the inhabitants of the Land of Grass, wear small bowls at their belts for drinking tea or eating porridge; and to hold out your hand to a man is simply an invitation "to pass his cup." Baj and Mavrones knew the meaning of the gesture, but had no cups to pass, a want which they expressed by signs and broken Mongol. This discovery was a further surprise to the priest: nay more, it was a shock: it was like the feeling which arises in the breasts of English visitors at a certain town in Algeria, when they discover that what they see under the open coat of the Customs Officer, is not really an embroidered waistcoat, but an elegant system of tattoo-marks with a white collar and neck-tie painted on. The Lama's surprise however was mingled with compassion; a person who could not afford a wooden bowl to eat with

must be poor indeed! Another thought suggested itself in the Lama's mind, as he went out in search of a stray tea bowl, for his own was of scented wood, silver bound, too good to give to a stranger. "Perhaps they do not eat or drink!" he reflected: "that would explain a good many things!" It seemed too extraordinary to be true, but still, as he passed a group of men who were examining with a childlike curiosity the contents of the travellers' baggage, he could not refrain from asking: Have they any provisions?"

"None whatever, Lord Lama: nothing but psalm books and queer little Buddhas and ornaments."

"Psalm books!" said the Lama: "their heads were not shaved!" He stooped down to examine the parchment scroll marked with Greek characters—it was a treatise of Prodikos. The letters were entirely unknown to him, and he felt still more puzzled. "It is indeed a psalm book!" he said sagely as he walked away.

When he got the cups, he scarcely liked to return to offer the strangers tea. If they did eat and drink like other men, why did they carry no cups? why ride in a blank desert without provisions? His perplexity was increased by the discovery of the sacred writings; the idea that such writings could be anything but sacred, did not occur to him. Sacred writings in an unknown language, as sole luggage for a traveller in the desert! It was quite inexplicable: especially for "black men" with hair on their heads. Then their dress was quite unheard of: he knew the three great languages of the world—Chinese, Mongol and Tibetan: he knew the look of Turcomans and Hill-men besides; but he had never come across anything in the world like this dress and language.

By the time he returned to the tent, Mavrones and Baj were already engaged upon the mutton, which the boy had brought over from the other tent; and the old Lama had at least the satisfaction of finding that his new acquaintances were not so inhuman as he imagined: they could at any rate eat and drink. They were too worn out by the exertions of the last two days to enjoy the fat mutton, and after a few mouthfuls were glad to lie down among the rugs and make signs to the two or three Dchiahours who had come to look on, that they proposed retiring for the night.

The men nodded, but did not move: so Baj and Mavrones, without standing upon ceremony, put off a few of their clothes, rolled themselves in the rugs and skins, and were soon asleep. As soon as they appeared unconscious, the natives, whose curiosity had till then been restrained by their politeness, came up and examined them closely, throwing the light of a lamp on the tired and haggard faces whose features seemed so very odd to men accustomed to Mongolian types. Then they sat round the fire for a few minutes talking about the strangers and their curious arrival, and why they had no food and so many scriptures, and such queer faces and dresses still more queer, and so on till one after another fell asleep by the fire side, and all the tent was still.

If Mavrones had not been too terribly exhausted, and too much occupied with the idea of food and rest to busy himself about other peoples' concerns, he would probably have felt inquisitive to know what brought the Dchiahour caravan so far out towards the desert. Certainly such curiosity would have been justified. The Dchiahours had been turned aside from their way by their companion's illness, and

that way was a special pilgrimage undertaken under rather curious circumstances.

The monastery of Gorbashi is not celebrated, as far as I know, either for wealth or wisdom or piety ; but nevertheless it is the abode of an incarnate Buddha. Such beings are not so very rare in the spiritual dominions of the Grand Lama as one might at the first blush imagine. Some scores of monasteries are presided over by living Buddhas, who are all of equal divine rank, and whose numbers, though they may occasionally increase, can never grow less. All the Buddhas are of course immortal, but transmigrate like ordinary men ; the only difference being that they always reappear in human form and have to be taken back to their monastery. Now it so happened, that the Incarnate Buddha of Gorbashi was not considered a good man of business, and the *lamasery* felt the need of a bursar and practical head. The bursar was appointed : and the Incarnate Buddha shut up in a temple and worshipped. The spiritual and temporal rulers got on as badly as one would expect : and a few months before the events just narrated, the bursar had compelled the Buddha to transmigrate by putting laudanum in his tea. Soon after the burial of the Lama's discarded body, news came that at a certain Thibetan village, high up on the Brahmaputra, a baby had made its appearance which seemed destined to a high function in life : at any rate it could repeat 11,000 prayers without a mistake ; declared itself to have been poisoned in its previous existence, and slapped its mother's face for killing an earwig—a signal proof of holiness and superior claims. Nothing remained but formally to complete the identification, by giving the baby the Lama's books and nicnacs to recognise, and then to

escort it with all pomp to be re-installed at Gorbashi. A caravan had started with a goodly equipment of camels and baggage to make the dangerous journey to Thibet, across the desolate wastes of snow and precipitous passes, where no human being can live except the Kolo. But another accident had occurred on the way. A rich Tartar belonging to the party had fallen ill, and, in spite of the most sacred texts, rolled into pills and taken daily before meals, in spite of two small nails driven into his arm, in spite of countless charms and exorcisms of the ordinary kind, had continued obstinately to get worse. At last, as the chance of his migration seemed perceptibly increasing hour by hour, the priests had taken him a day's journey into an unknown part of Gobi, to cast the fiends out from him into the wilderness in a solemn and ceremonious manner. They meant to rejoin the main body after two days.

Soon after daybreak most of the natives were on their feet, and had dispersed to look after their various duties. Only four were left near the two travellers, who were still fast asleep. One man was busy catching and slaughtering a sheep to serve for the camp's dinner that afternoon: two Lamas were making tea and going through their religious exercises; one other Lama, the youngest of the three, was still lying half asleep on his rug. The butcher whistled to himself as he held down and stabbed the sheep, and hung up the body from a hook on the outside of the tent; but no other sound disturbed the monotonous whisper of the Lama's prayers. At last the prayers were done, and the two priests, *flâneurs*, like all of the Tartar kind, lounged together at the door of the tent.

"Samda Ghu," said the younger after a few minutes of silence.

"Well, my younger brother!" (The relationship was merely a polite fiction.)

"Do you really know anything about these two strangers?"

It was a difficult question, because Samda Ghu had put on a certain air of mystery, as if he knew more than he cared to say. He hesitated a moment, then replied:

"What do you think of them?"

"I can scarcely believe that they are men. What do you say?"

"There are many nations of men that you have never seen, little brother, and they have many curious manners."

"Still, they cannot ride in the desert without food. And why should they appear suddenly at midnight in the middle of our exorcisms?"

"That shews at any rate they cannot be devils."

"Perhaps they are good spirits," muttered a sleepy voice from a corner of the tent.

"An ignorant young man, who stays in bed when his elders are dressed, has no right to talk of spirits;" remarked Samda Ghu sententiously. The young man still in bed was a very bad Lama: he never knew his prayers, never went through his exercises, could not cure a fever nor drive out a devil properly, and never got up when he was told. Yet in spite of his reckless and irreverent life, he was generally recognized as the cleverest of Samda Ghu's pupils, and for some reason or other his words generally had a good deal of weight, perhaps because his body had.

"You had better go over to the other tent, my

father," he continued, "and see if the fever has abated. That will be a test."

"It would be better for you to get up and go through your devotions, instead of lying there and giving advice to your masters," retorted the old Lama : then, after a pause, he turned to his companion at the door. "Perhaps you had better go across and see about the sick man."

In a few minutes the middle Lama returned with an awed expression, bearing the news that the invalid was considerably better. "It does look as if they were good spirits:" he said, "or at any rate holy men from the West."

"That is wiser," said Samda Ghu ; "to conclude, whenever you see a man with strange habits, that he is either a devil or a good spirit, is superstition and not true religion."

"But if they are men, where do they come from?" said the other. "They are not Chinese nor Tartars nor Turcomans nor Thibetans."

"They may be Oros," suggested the old Lama cautiously. (Oros are Russians and Siberians.)

"Impossible father," said the voice from the bed : "the Oros always wear skins and drive in sledges. More likely they are Pe-ling." (English.)

"In truth, speech in the young only serves to make folly more apparent," said the old man. "Pe-ling cannot live so far from the sea : besides they all have red hair and blue eyes."

"Who are the Pe-ling?" said the butcher outside the tent.

"The Peling are sea-beasts, my son, who came to import bad opium to Shanghai ; and for some time they damaged the crops and set fire to houses ; and when the soldiers shot at them they dived under the

water, and stayed there for hours. At last the Son of the Sky sent Yang with the Northern Army to destroy them, and Yang dragged them out of the water, and killed them all or left them to die like fish upon the shore . . . So the son of idleness spoke mere folly," he added with a glance at the bed.

"I don't believe all that about the Pe-ling, my father. I met a Chinaman who had been taught by a Pe-ling how to dig for silver, and he said that some of them had black hair and hooked noses like a Mahometan, and, so far from dying on land, they couldn't stay under water more than half an hour or so."

An awe-struck silence fell upon the whole party: it was not the disrespect of the young priest to his elders, it was not even his sceptical spirit, that produced such a painful impression. It was the horrible cynicism of a Lama avowing that he had spoken freely to a ruffian who tried to learn mining. In the Chinese Empire, as occasionally elsewhere, mines are conducted by gangs of robbers: only there they form bands several thousands strong, defy the police, and dig all together, till they have either exhausted the surface-yield, or have to disperse before the large armies which are sent against them by the Imperial government. They generally eke out their mining gains by brigandage, and are looked upon as the most desperate of malefactors.

If any other Lama under Samda Ghu's control had spoken in this way, he would have been beaten without stint or delay. But this young reprobate had such a coolness in his manner, and so much more brains than his preceptor, that he never got half the cudgellings his faults cried for.

"Blasphemous and indolent priest," said the old

Lama sternly, "go, sleep again, and talk no more of your sottish vices!" He was pleased with the sentence as he uttered it, but afterwards began to feel that his rebuke was entirely inappropriate to the circumstances, and that in all probability the young scape-grace had seen through it. With a certain irritation in his mind he changed the subject.

"The real question is what we are to do with them now that they are here."

He was sorry to have said this the moment after: it was a virtual surrender of his claims to superior knowledge, which he had not yet utterly abandoned.

"How do you know they will stop with us?" said the graceless one. "They may want to go off somewhere on their own account."

"They came in such a suspicious way that I could not think of letting them go. Your levity shocks even the butcher!"

"You said they were not devils—so what harm can there be in letting them go?"

There was no answer to this, so the young man continued:

"And what will you do with them, if you do keep them against their will?"

"I will take them with us throughout our pilgrimage and consult the living Buddha what they are, and what is to be done to them."

"The Buddha of Gorbashi! Why he is only a baby; and even before he migrated, when he was grown up, he had no more practical sense than a baby. His advice would be as worthless as anyone's could be."

"Blasphemer! The divine knowledge will appear in the lips of a child."

"But you must get the advice of a sensible man. If you want inspiration as well——"

"Well, I do want inspiration as well."

"Send them to the Branchan Rimboochay!"

This was a brilliant idea, and Samda Ghu could not even feign to despise it. The Branchan Rimboochay is not only a Buddha of unrivalled sanctity but a first-rate diplomatist and man of business as well. At a pinch he even resorts to miracles, which however are generally reckoned vulgar by Lamas of the educated class, and are given up to itinerant deacons and demoniacs. The Branchan Rimboochay also knows more about foreign nations and Western learning than any other member of the hierarchy that worships Tsong-Kaba. He would be just the man to consult about such a difficulty as this. But besides there was a further motive that stirred the approbation of Samda Ghu. He had a strong feeling that the little monastery of Gorbashi was in need of influential support from without; some close alliance with a great man was necessary to keep up the revenue and prestige of the place, and, more than that, to frustrate the designs of the Bursar's party, who were more than likely to put the baby Buddha to the trouble of another transmigration as soon as he dared to shew a will of his own. A compliment to the Branchan Rimboochay would be just the thing: the consultation would lead to a certain friendliness, and the rest was only a matter of detail.

"You would do better, my son, to get up and say your prayers than to talk lightly of great men."

"Well, will you send them to the Branchan? Tell me and I will get up," said the young priest, sitting up in bed.

"I cannot say yet, I must think."

The young man fell back again into the rugs :
“Well, when you have quite made up your mind, tell me, and I will get up.”

“I think upon the whole I will.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will get up.” And so saying the Lama sprang out of bed, rapidly put on his robe, and sat down on a stool by the fire. “You had better come to breakfast,” he said, as he sprinkled barley meal into his bowl.

His master obeyed his call, and the whole party began their breakfast, a frugal repast consisting chiefly of the aforementioned barley meal. Sitting in a circle round the fire, and chatting on idly about various topics, they did not notice that Mavrone had been awakened by the noise of their voices, and was looking hard about him to make out where he was and who were breakfasting in his bed-room. In a minute or two the memory of the day before came back—the terrible ride, the heat and fatigue and hunger, and the hourly expectation of death in the desert: then the curious light and noise, the flaming figure and the dance, and the strange reception of muskets and spears and solemn curses that met them at the end of the journey. It occurred to him as quite possible that he had fallen in with some stray band of brigands, who would either kill him or treat him as a slave. Yet there were priests here: and priests did not live much among the Kolo, who were the enemies of all religion. He determined to make sure about this as soon as he could catch the old Lama's eye.

Presently the breakfast was at an end: the eldest and youngest priests went across to the other tent to

make further enquiries about the invalid, while the other priest and the butcher sat down by the door to play some kind of game upon a draught board. It seemed more complicated than draughts and the men were of shapes quite unlike any European pieces.

Mavrones sat up in bed and called in Mongol, "Good-morning." The two players looked up, smiled and nodded, and then went on with their game. They evidently did not understand Mongol, and Mavrones, feeling for the time baffled, relapsed into silence till the eldest priest returned. As soon as Mavrones saw his face through the doorway he got up again and cried "Good-morning," or some similar greeting, quoted from his conversation book.

The old Lama answered volubly, but what he meant was more than Mavrones could understand. At any rate he seemed affable.

"Are you brigands, my father?" he asked bluntly after a few minutes of silence.

"What! We brigands?" said the old man, intelligible this time.

"Yes, are you brigands?"

Another voluble answer followed, from which Mavrones gathered that they were not brigands, but pilgrims, and were indignant at his suspicion. He apologized as well as he could. "What are you going to do with us?" he said at last with an absorbing determination to understand the answer.

"Keep you with us," said the old man.

"Where are you going?"

Answer not to be understood.

"What are you going to do with us then?"

"I shall give you over to the Branchan Rim-boochay."

"Where does he live—North or South?"

"South."

"Many thanks: that is where I wish to go."

The old Lama, who had not thought much of this aspect of the question, paused for a few moments to think. Then he began to ask questions which Mavrones, amid many hesitations and repetitions, made ungrammatical shifts to answer.

"The respectable fatherland of my nephew is a long way from here?"

"A very long way. It is far from Peking to Lhasa but it is four times as far to my country."

"This is either a real sage or a very daring impostor," thought the old man. "May an aged priest hear the name of my nephew's country?"

"I am called a Hellen: but my friend is a Pe-ling."

"It is obviously all made up," thought Samda Ghu, as he answered: "I have heard of the Pe-ling before, but never of the He-ling."

"Well, I myself am almost Pe-ling: I have lived among them most of my life."

"Why did you come to Tartary?"

"My countrymen have a great city in the desert: I came to visit it."

"A city in the desert? Truth is great;" observed the old man.

"Even so, my father: a great city and very old."

"Yet my nephew left it?"

"We were cast out:" Mavrones saw that his story was not believed, and tried all the harder to give a plain and intelligible account of his adventures.

It was hardly a history to take on the word of a stranger at any time, and Mavrones was conscious that his Mongolian was undergoing a severe strain in

the effort to frame anything like connected sentences. The idea he conveyed to the old priest's mind can hardly have been more definite or lifelike than the second-hand account of a night-mare: and he felt unpleasantly conscious that he must appear either a complete lunatic or the most clumsy and audacious of liars. At last he finished his tale, and, with a sense of relief, turned the laboured conversation to the subject of breakfast, which the old man prepared to give him with alacrity.

They had neither of them noticed Baj, who had been up for some time, and was watching with some distress the operations of the two players by the door.

"I say," he called to Mavrones; "it's check! They're playing chess," he added: "and it's check, and this miserable priest is going to move on quite calmly."

The butcher looked up suddenly at the words: Baj went on: "By Jove, it's check-mate too; I wish I could make them see it."

"*Chic-mât*," said the butcher in a triumphant tone, pointing to the board and smiling up at Baj.

Those words are, I take it, about the only two common to English and Dchiahour. Chess, in the form we play, is probably a Thibetan game. At any rate the game is very old in Thibet, and the Thibetan technical terms are very widely spread through the world, being practically the same in all languages.

"Well, I'm blessed;" said Baj, as the conquered priest got up with a shrug and a smile, "I believe he understood me." He was stepping back towards his bed, when the butcher by signs called him forward, and invited him to take the place the priest had just left. Slipping on his coat, and taking the cup of tea

which the senior Lama handed him, Baj sat down very comfortably to the chess, and was soon combining a good game with a hearty breakfast. Mavrones, a few feet away, was keeping up an animated though grammarless conversation with the old Lama, and enjoying fully the delightful sense of security and companionship and rest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT day, as had been arranged with the larger body of the pilgrims, was to be spent in rest: since the sick man could hardly be expected to travel immediately after having his devils cast out. Tartars never find any difficulty in doing nothing for a whole week together; and Mavrones and Baj were too worn out by their late sufferings to feel averse to idleness. They walked about together, discussing their probable fate, or examining the habits of their hosts and trying to start simple conversations by means of Mongol and signs. They managed somehow to gain the good-will of most of the party, especially that of the sick man, who was getting rapidly better and considered his improvement in some sense or other due to the arrival of the mysterious strangers. The reprobate Lama also was kindly disposed towards them, principally because their curious appearance afforded a promising material for his wit; and secondly, because they had been, so to speak, the battle-ground, on which he had won a signal victory over his spiritual superiors. His view of the strangers had already begun to be considered orthodox. In all probability they were either spirits or wise men from the West, and consequently entitled to respectful treatment. On the other hand they might be Pe-ling: and there was certainly something ambiguous about their origin. It was just as well to be on the safe side about unknown foreigners: as

they were willing to be taken to the Branchan Rimboe nay, that was obviously a simple solution of the difficulty.

This being once definitely settled, the Reprobate naturally began to change his mind. The next morning, as the little encampment broke up, and started caravan-wise to rejoin the main pilgrimage, he made a point of keeping close to Baj and Mavrones, and assisting them to get their packs together and their horses harnessed. He made himself as agreeable as he could during the journey, his powers being limited by his comparative ignorance of Mongol, and their entire ignorance of any other language he was likely to have heard of. The way was easy, and the scenery scarcely diversified from the ordinary Gobi sand and stones. Only a few patches of yellow and dying grass appeared like the ghosts of old oases among the sterile stretches, and as the day went on, it was just possible to descry the misty blue of the far off Thibetan ranges, and here and there to catch the gleam of a stray shaft of sunlight on the great southern pinnacles of desolate and untrodden snow. In three days they would be among the mountains.

"A difficult route—is it not?" asked Mavrones of the old priest.

"Not quite so dangerous as the journey eastward from Lhasa to China; but about a tenth part of the men generally die on an expedition and a quarter of the animals."

"As many as that? What kills them?"

"Cold or starving. Then, a good many get lost in the snow or fall over precipices, and if the Kolo come down they kill still more. There is one mountain where a devil lives, and his breath is poisonous and

covers all the lower slopes—my brother's son was stifled there nearly a year ago."

"Stifled by the poisonous air? How dreadful!" said Mavrones in an enquiring tone.

"It is a long story and I fear—"

"If it is not painful to you to repeat it I should be most interested."

"It is the privilege of young men to hear stories from the old," observed the Lama: "besides if you are Pe-ling, the story has to do with your country . . . My brother's son was on a kind of pilgrimage. He lived in the tents of our prince, near Gabortong. There was a large encampment of shepherds there, looking after the prince's sheep: but one day as my nephew was sitting in his tent after supper,—he was at the edge of the encampment,—he thought he heard the noise of a troop of horses passing. He went to the door and found a man just dismounting, a very dark man and richly dressed, so he told me. 'Good evening,' said my nephew, 'Tsong-Kaba blesses both the white and the black; therefore come in and have some tea.'"

"Are you one of the shepherds of Prince Tolbo?" asked the stranger. "If so, tell your master that I have taken away his sheep, and that henceforth he had better keep his possessions more to the East."

"And if my master wishes to chastise you, what name shall I give him?"

"The chief of the Dharkal from beyond the Himalayas. Tell him it would be unwise to pursue me: there are ten thousand good fighters among the Dharkal."

"There is the Son of the Sky to help our Prince: and no man can count his soldiers nor hold out against his anger."

"And behind me are the Pe-ling, who are more and stronger than the servants of the Son of the Sky: and only seek a quarrel against him to destroy him and his princes. It is they who have sent us over the mountains to plunder your land and slay those who withstand us. Say that we spared the men of prince Tolbo, because they were cowards and dared not hinder us from doing our will."

"Of rather, because the men of prince Tolbo put you to flight and slew your chief," answered my brother's son, and giving a shout to alarm the camp, jumped straight on to the horse's saddle and seized the Indian by the throat. They struggled together for a few minutes; and then, he said, there was a great rush of horses and he felt a heavy blow on the head, and just remembered falling to the ground. He was insensible for a time, and then found himself lying down in his tent, and his wife looking after him. The mountaineers had made off safely with all the flocks. Well, my brother's son gave news to the Prince; and the Prince, greatly in anger, summoned all his household and went after the robbers. But they had got far ahead and he could not find them, and came back more wroth than before. Then he set out to Peking and called upon the Emperor to avenge him, saying that the Pe-ling sought a quarrel against him, and, unless they were checked, would send all the Hill Men to plunder the land of Grass. Wherefore he begged them to send forthwith an army to the North West to cut off the Hill Men from the face of the earth. And the Son of the Sky himself would have sent the soldiers at once, but his counsellors put off the sending of them from day to day, and at last persuaded the Emperor that it would be a perilous business and he had better shift

it off on to the shoulders of the Grand Lama; for they said a danger from the Pe-ling more nearly touched Thibet. So they gave the Prince letters to shew the regent of Thibet and the Chinese governors, and he started off from Peking hastily, hoping to overtake the Great Winter Caravan that goes with gifts from the Sun of the Sky to the Grand Lama. But when he reached Koun-houm he found he was too late: and they started off, he and fifty soldiers and my brother's son, in the early spring, when the rivers would still be frozen hard. And whether they got to Lhasa, I know not, nor whether they set out against the Himalaya men. No one has heard yet, what end they had to their journey."

"But you said your nephew was killed!"

"Yes; we heard of him. My brother is a merchant who travels to and fro between Lhasa and Tchogortan. He knows many of the other merchants who travel there, and when he passes the high places where there are rows of dead men sitting frozen by the way side, he always turns up their faces and melts away the snow and icicles on them, to see if any of his friends are there. Well, he came that way about half a year back, and close by the poison-mountain he found a great many dead men sitting together with their bowls of barley meal laid ready by the side of them, in case the cold should loose hold of them again. He looked all through the line and only found one man he knew, a merchant who had accused him falsely to a mandarin and had him thrown into prison. So my brother knelt down and buried him in the snow, and said prayers for the peace of his soul. Then he was passing on, when he saw one body lying on the ground at the foot of the rock, difficult to get at from the beaten way: and

his companions said : ' Let us pass on : it may be a stranger ; or it may be a rogue like this merchant ; small profit to pray for either.' Yet my brother went back, and climbed down to the dead man ; and, when he uncovered the face, he found it was his son. But the rest of the prince's caravan, no one has heard of them—they may be in Lhasa collecting soldiers, or they may be dead."

"What a sad story. He was frozen to death, then, on the way?"

"Most likely he was made stupid by stifling in the vapours and fell over the cliff, and then was frozen where he lay. When men are simply frozen, they leave them sitting by the road side with their bowls of barley meal."

Mavrone did not answer, but looked at the great shadowy mountains that rose to the South. He hesitated for a time whether to go on with the Caravan through this fatal country which after all only led to Lhasa : a place so difficult of access that not ten Europeans have ever reached it, and not all of them returned alive. It would be a cruel bathos at the end of their enterprise, after having passed through such curious perils, seen such hardships and such strange shapes of death, after having won their great prize and found it even more precious than their hopes ; at the end to be left sitting frozen beside some narrow pass on those enormous unexplored ranges, their priceless MSS. used perhaps as fuel for a Tartar camp-fire, and the little bowl of barley meal frozen stiff at their side. There was, after all, the alternative of breaking away from the caravan and travelling along the line of the Great Wall towards Peking. Still it was a much longer journey ; and they had very little money ; and if their packs were sus-

pected of being valuable, it was practically certain that they would be robbed. Then there was the difficulty of the laws against foreigners travelling in China. It would be impossible to pass as Mongols with their scanty knowledge of the language and their European type of countenance; and, once suspected of being what they were, death with or without torture, was the only thing they could expect. Their only safety would be in threats or bribes; and under the circumstances, Mavrones felt, they could hardly manage either. A journey through China, now that their escort was gone, would be quite as dangerous as through the Thibetan wilderness; and after all the question was practically decided for them by their host, who had no idea of parting with them until they reached the Branchan Rimboochay.

About eight o'clock in the evening they reached the larger body of Pilgrims, some two hundred in all, escorted by fifty soldiers. The pilgrims were of various nations: a few Thibetans, a great many Mongols, and five or six chinese who were never spoken to by the rest of the party; at least they were only spoken to with reluctance on rare occasions, chiefly for the purpose of borrowing money. Most people had already gone to bed when the travellers arrived. Early hours were a necessity, as the whole camp was roused before sunrise every day they were on the march; unless indeed the man who had to fire the signal-cannon happened to oversleep himself. Mavrones and Baj were formally introduced to the military and religious chiefs of the party, and no objection was made to their joining the expedition until the time came to deliver them to the Branchan Rim-

boochay. They shared with the old Lama the conveniences of a tent and an acolyte.

Next day the journey began. In a week they were high up among the mountains, on the precipitous rocks and in the intolerable cold. A week more, and the ranks of the pilgrims began to grow thinner. One of the Chinese was the first to fall. He had been fearfully weak when they started, and as the cold began to increase, his yellow face grew more and more transparent, and his hollow cough racked him more and more: yet he never uttered a word of complaint, and never ceased computing the interest on the money he lent, or doubling the price of the skins and meal he sold, till one day he dropped quietly off his horse on the road and died, while two of his friends waited behind and stripped him of his coats of sheep-skin.

The Englishmen suffered terribly from the very first; and, but for the constant attentions of the acolyte Ghiemba, and the gift of several sheepskins from a certain highly reprehensible character who was never out of bed in the morning when the second cannon ordered the start, they would hardly have borne up even for the first fortnight. But the cold grew deeper and deeper. Every man's hair and beard was stiff with icicles, and the hot cakes they baked in the morning and carried underneath three sheepskins were frozen hard by noon.

And so the journey passed on. There were no brigands; either they had all gone to attack the Greek city, or perhaps the fifty soldiers were enough to keep them away. They passed the troops of yaks frozen in the river, they had tried to cross in summer-time, standing with their horns and heads above the ice, and their eyes pecked out by vultures. They

passed the bodies and the bones of horses and camels: and the thick visible gases that fill the air of the Poison-mountain; they crossed Mount Chuga, and saw the rows of dead men frozen by the side of the way with the cups of barley meal beside them. In the constant hardships and miseries of every day, they almost forgot the problem of their further destiny. They had asked the old Lama about the Branchan Rimboochay, and what he was likely to do with them when they were brought to his charge.

"He will let us go across to India, I suppose," said Mavrones.

"The Branchan and many great Bishops are averse to the desires of foreigners."

"But when we explain that we only want to leave the country?"

"Who knows?" replied Samda Ghu: "even rich men and magistrates may be moved by the consideration of the virtues."

"At least you will intercede for us?"

"That I will do most heartily."

No clear result came from this conversation. Another time Samda Ghu had said. "Even if the Branchan should suffer you to go to India, the way over the Himalayas is difficult." Another time he had suggested the propriety of setting up a school in Lhasa: "Though not well educated," he observed, "you might teach many things about the Western countries which even Lamas do not know."

And so the problem remained. For the present at any rate, all they had to do was to struggle on through the rugged passes and try to prevent their fingers and noses from coming off with the frost.

One curious thing occurred more than two months after their start:

By that time they had almost passed the really desolate regions of their journey. For the last three days they had been traversing a long plateau, and on this particular evening had come in sight, for the first time since leaving Tartary, of flocks and herds and human habitations. They could just descry the long blue columns of smoke, rising from the huts of the almost savage shepherds who dwelt furthest to the North of Thibet, on the verge of the uninhabitable highlands. The shepherds themselves lived only in the valleys, and never cared to climb the peaks or "prospect" for new pastures. They knew too much about cold and hunger to have any great zeal for the uncomfortable picturesque. Yet this particular night there were fires burning on the hill-tops here and there, a line of irregular beacons, as it were, stretching Westward as far as eye could see.

"What is the meaning of those fires?" asked Mavrones of Samda Ghu, as they rode down towards the first valley. "Is it a sign of war?"

"I cannot tell. The shepherds are wont to light a beacon when they wish to consult the caravans that pass,—when they have lost cattle or friends upon the mountains. But these fires go far to the Westward, beyond where any caravans pass."

"Can it not be a war-signal?"

"No. The fires are larger for war; and there would be more men moving about in the valleys: besides they would cry the war cry on the hill-tops."

Mavrones said nothing; he was reflecting on the extraordinary power of Tartar eye-sight which could tell at that distance whether there were men moving about in the valleys or no. He rode on silently down the slapping snow, thinking with inexpressible comfort of the pleasure of reaching country where

everything is not frozen, and where you can feel grass under your feet. There had been great trees here and there on the lower parts of the long table-land which they had just crossed; that was the only vegetation they had seen for months. It would be quite like a new life to get among meadows and pastures, and running water again; and have some other food than this miserable frozen barley meal; to hear the noise of human business and the sound of human voices, instead of the desolation and terrific silence of the mountain ways.

Suddenly from one of the peaks where a fire was burning a loud cry came floating towards them on the wind. A race which telegraphs by shouting gets in time wonderful lung-power; but this cry was already faint when it reached Mavrones' ears, owing to the great distance.

"Listen!" cried he, "is that the war cry?"

"No"; answered Samda Ghu. "I never heard any cry like it before."

It came again towards them; and then was repeated a third time. The sound was still faint, but distinct and articulate, as though the crier had difficulty in uttering the syllables, and was determined to be, at any cost, clear.

"Can you understand what he says?" asked Mavrones: "the words sound distinct."

"Truth is upon your lips, my son, but my eyes have not seen knowledge. The man is too far away; but we shall arrive under that hill in an hour or two."

The voice was not heard again. The caravan went on through the darkness which was now growing dense, picking its way down the rough sides of the plateau. The way was longer than it had appeared,

and the road more difficult. It was drawing on towards midnight by the time they reached the level pastures and struggling vegetation of the valley. There are few valleys in these parts less than six thousand feet high. This was considerably higher, and in fact not inhabited except in summer. The shepherds who lighted the beacon lived in the next valley beyond the hills. "It is a pity we cannot go on to the shepherds and ask what their signals meant;" observed Samda Ghu, when they had put up the tent and tethered the camels, and were sitting down to supper, thoroughly tired.

"Cannot? Why can't we?" said the Reprobate. "We could get to the top of the next hill in two hours."

"It is already later than a man can travel safely—and besides we are all too tired to go any further."

"I believe a camel is as safe by night as by day."

"We could not get to the top till nearly sunrise."

"I bet you a quarter of an ounce of silver I shall get there before your camel is asleep."

"My son, this is not priestly. You must not go out like this at midnight."

"Must I not? If you will give me another cup of tea, I will go and untie my camel . . . Besides," he added as an afterthought, "the Captain of the Escort will want to know."

Samda Ghu did not move, so the young Lama helped himself. He drank the tea slowly, having put in more barley meal than usual. Then he got up.

"You had better meet me in the morning;" he said; "I shall spend the night with the shepherds in the next valley,"

"My son cuts short his days by foolishness;" was the only answer the old man condescended to make.

He was too well accustomed to these vagaries now, to get really angry.

"I will go with you:" suddenly said the acolyte Ghiemba—"I am not at all tired."

"Idle and lawless child, prostrate yourself thirty times round the tent; that is better than going abroad with foolish priests. Out upon you, dog! You are asleep all day instead of working: that is why you are not tired at night. Go, prostrate yourself! and repeat the fifty virtues of Buddha at every prostration. Think of the vileness of your own heart, do not hanker after the ways of that accursed one."

Samda Ghu was not to be put upon by everybody. He sat at the door to watch the unfortunate boy going through his punishment, lest he should miss a single round of his thirty. The poor boy threw himself upon the ground and gabbled in a tearful voice the fifty virtues of Buddha. Then he got up, put his feet where his hands had been, and prostrated himself again; so he went on, round and round the tent, till at last the thirty circles were completed; and after another scolding he was allowed to go to bed.

The Accursed one meantime, having shouted good-night to the party, and expressed his sympathy with Ghiemba by motions behind the old man's back, rode off on his camel towards the slope of the beacon hill. The camel, disgusted at being roused out of its first repose, uttered hideous grunts and cries, and spat, and jumped, and in every possible way gave vent to its displeasure. For the first ten minutes sounds of altercation were audible; then camel and rider disappeared in the darkness.

Mavrones and Baj were sitting in the tent and talking together in English. They did not take

much trouble to learn either Thibetan or Dchiahour, to follow the conversation of their captors. They did not even notice what intention the Reprobate had in going out, nor realize that he meant actually to leave the caravan for the night. Only after he had started, and the old Lama had begun to preside over the unhappy Ghiemba's prostrations, did they enquire what had happened and why the boy was so hardly punished.

"Gone to find out what the fires meant, has he?" said Baj, when Mavrones explained in English what the old Lama told him. "I rather wish we had gone with him."

"We could not have understood what the shepherds said, so I don't suppose we should have been any the wiser."

"I suppose not," said Baj, as he lay down among his sheepskins,—“but what were you going to say?”

"Well, do you know, I couldn't help fancying that the cry on the mountain was very like my name;—it seemed to end with 'Mavrones.'"

"Ah, I didn't notice it," said Baj—"Perhaps 'Mavrones,' like 'check-mate,' will turn out to be a Thibetan name. Good-night."

"Next morning at about eleven o'clock they overtook the Reprobate; he was in the valley beyond the hills, dying under a tree with a fire by him, like a man who would be asleep if he could. When he saw the caravan he mounted his camel and rode back.

"Well," said Samda Ghu, "what were the beacons for?"

"It is a custom they have every year. The shepherds said that when their fathers first settled here, all the villages agreed that on one night in the

year, at sunset and sunrise, they should all light beacons to shew that they were still prospering. But on other nights a beacon was a sign for help."

"Manners are strange: I never heard of this before. But what was the cry?"

"The cry? Oh, it was part of the same custom. They only shouted, 'All well still,' from village to village. I must go and report about it to the captain of the Escort."

CHAPTER XIX.

THREE months before that cry among the silent snow peaks floated thinly over the valley to Mavrones' ears, Lady Strathbourne was sitting in the veranda of a bungalow, not fifty miles from Darjeeling. It was the sort of scene known to most of us, at least as far as photographs go, the solemn slopes in the foreground, the mountain walls towering one behind the other, till one dare not say what is mountain and what cloud; unless at some clear sunrise the clouds roll suddenly down earthwards, and right at the back of all the frowning ranges the marvellous brow of Kichinjanja, miles away, rises darkly against the high blue heaven. Clearista was reading in the veranda; at least she had been reading, but now the sun was almost set, and even before the light began to fade she had dropped the book on her lap, and fallen to talking with the girl who lay in a long cane chair a few feet away. For there was with her, who but you, Dolores? gentlest of all God's creatures and most strangely fair, whose speech was sweeter than any music and wiser than any wisdom that is in books. I wish I could paint that scene: the dim evening sky shot with fire, the mountains, and the woods between, and the garden flowers, and the air hanging heavily with the autumn and the rising night; and you with Clearista talking upon the veranda, half an hour before a word of yours did justice to many injured, and saved ten men's lives, as it has saved others since. Clearista I know detail by

detail: I can draw in my mind's tablet every line, and colour of every shade, that moves in that pale face and that halo-like hair: but, as you know, I never could catch nor describe one of your features, never make out the mould of your face nor the light of your eyes, nor the hues upon your cheek: no bodily reminiscence comes up when I think of you: only a misty grace, a gentle fearlessness, a spirit as it were of wisdom and good-will: and somewhere in the background the shadow that is not you, lingers, a waste of all but uncompensated pain.

"George is getting very stout,"—said Clearista, glancing up in the air.

Dolores took a field glass and looked up in the same direction:

"That is Lord Strathbourne in the white waistcoat, isn't it? Do you know I think everybody looks stout in a balloon: They are so foreshortened."

"Perhaps that is so. Old Sir Cannibal looks quite globular."

Sir Hannibal Cohen was one of the greatest people in the district. What his title was I must confess to forgetting—Indian government is such an abstruse matter, an outsider can never make out who is to do what particular duty. At any rate it appears that at this date Sir Hannibal had been left at Calcutta as a kind of plenipotentiary,—the Court had not yet returned from Simla,—and had just run up beyond Darjeeling for a week or so, to ingratiate himself with Lord Strathbourne. Besides his patriotic shrewdness, there was in his manner to all his inferiors a certain bluster and brutality, which gained him a wide reputation for having mastered fully the delicate susceptibilities of the Oriental mind.

"He is roundish even on earth. Why does your husband take him about so much "

"Just to torture him, I imagine. I asked George yesterday why he went up so continually in the balloon if it was as uncomfortable as he made out. He said 'Really, my dear, the agony of that beast Cohen is quite engrossing: it makes you forget how uncomfortable you are.'"

"I wonder Sir Hannibal goes."

"Oh, he does anything George or I tell him. . . Dear me, here comes McClusky in a passion."

The Scotch gardener was coming across the compound with a scythe in his hands and anger in his eye.

"If you please, my lady, there's just a troop of black fellows putting up a tent in a corner of the field by the road."

"Tell them to go away."

"I told them, and they took no notice of me: then I sent the two boys to talk to them in their own language. And, my lady, they've come back saying they can't understand a word. Then I sent Haschim: and he doesn't know their language, neither, but he says they must have come from beyond the mountains."

"Go and fetch a policeman, and make him turn them off."

"Come from beyond the mountains?" said Dolores: "It is rather hard to turn them away, isn't it? when they've come so far, and can't speak Hindustanee?"

"My dear Dolores, what can I do?"

"Let us go and look at them: and if they are not doing any harm we can let them stay."

"Very well: you had better fetch the policeman

all the same, McClusky; shew us the way first, though."

Clearista threw a woollen cloud over her head, and the two women followed the old gardener. The sun was set now, and darkness had settled suddenly upon all the landscape: they could not make out clearly the flowers and trees among which they were walking, and whose scent burdened the air. They followed a slightly winding path down the garden, and then turned off to cross a plantation of trees and an empty field, and finally passed through a little wicket into an open paddock, where the former owner of the bungalow had once kept a few cattle. It was a large piece of ground and long neglected, the grass of it only mown once in the last two years, and then only half way along. It rose high and luxuriant at the further end, beyond which came a fence and a road and another enclosure.

Close by the fence in the left hand corner, a great black mass, almost square-topped but slightly pointed in the centre, rose curiously luminous against the dim sky.

It was a Mongol tent. A fire shining through the open door threw an uncertain glare among the high tufts of grass;—a broad red light, in which the slender little shadows of the blades danced and flickered. It shone strangely up to the under leaves of the great banyan tree near the fence, and illuminated with a grotesque distortion the shapeless legs and hump and muzzle of a camel that was kneeling underneath it. There were other camels tethered outside the tent, great helpless melancholy anachronisms, vaguely discernible in the darkness, the hideous faces bearing even more markedly in that dim light their eternal

expression of hopeless endurance and malice never be satisfied, "like the faces of the damned."

The shadow of one figure is mixed with that gleam of fire-light, a figure seated on the ground and holding in his arms something delta-shaped, with lines of light running through it, so much we can tell from the shadow: but the music in the air tells us that this is a minstrel, and a harp in his hand.

Clearista felt her heart beating she knew not why: the first sight of the great tent and the fire-light seemed to call up memories confusedly shaped and emerging with difficulty from long oblivion. It reminded her of that village in the Steppes where she lived as a child; a place of sadness where she and her friends were outcasts, despised as a lower race by the strong ill-shapen Slavs around. The memory came back suddenly; how the girls of the next village had flouted her as a savage; and she had cried and had asked her mother why everyone despised and mocked them, and why they were worse than all their neighbours. And her mother told her that they were not worse but better than Slavs: they were Tartars; and their fathers had come from beyond desert and mountain and conquered these Slavs and trodden them underfoot, and built towers and pyramids of their heads in their cities: and had ruled over more nations than any race before or after them. And now their kings were dead, and their people scattered, and they lived like dogs to be mocked by the people they had conquered, and to endure scorn and slavery, till the great king should rise again, and all the Tartars from East to West march forth to battle together, and no power on earth stay their onset. Then she taught her the songs and lays of their ancestors, and spoke to her

always in the language of the old conquerors, which all the Tartars in the village round had forgotten or denied. The wild life of her early days, all the shame and the fierceness of it, came back to Clearista with a rush that made her heart beat quickly and her cheeks flush like fire. For the tune which came from that harp was one that had stirred her fifteen years ago, and made her blood leap with "passionate hatred for the Slavs who mocked her, and with joy at the coming of the great world-embracing revenge. It was the old call to Timour-Leng, held almost sacred among a nation not over rich in songs, a mournful solace for slavery and suffering, a long regret with a dash of hope in it, when the degradation of five hundred years is too heavy to be borne.

When Timour dwelt in the Tartar's ten.,
 The fear of the Tartar touched the sky :
 With the tread of his armies the earth was bent :
 There be nations ten thousand under the sun,
 But they all turned cold at the Tartar's eye.
 Wilt thou wake thee again, thou beloved and terrible one ?
 We are waiting, O Timour !

Our heart is angry and burnt with fire
 As we lie like sheep in the wilderness,
 For glory dead and for long desire :
 Who will arise to lead us yet,
 And set our face as a soldier's face ?
 Wilt thou wake thee again, whom we worship and will not forget ?
 We are waiting, O Timour !

O strong and keen as the Eagles are !
 We yet can bend thee the wild colt's pride,
 We can spy thee the track of the camel afar :
 But the bow of his father can no man bend,
 Nor spy the slayer at evening tide.
 Wilt thou wake thee again, O destroyer, and be our friend ?
 We are waiting, O Timour.

Lo, one hath seen from the holy hill
 A Lama's scarf float red in the air,
 And Hope rose up and our grief was still.
 —Doth God uncover the things to be,
 'Thou Lama, when thou art bent in prayer?—
 Wilt thou wake thee again, O unconquered, and make us free?
 We are waiting, O Timour!

We have burned our spices before thee, Lord,
 Rich gifts and gold in the desert sands,
 With the tea-branch stripped and the milk outpoured—
 Up, thou that prayest! For this is the hour,
 And the wrath of the dead is a sword in our hands!
 Thou, Timour, arise and deliver us, Prince of Power.
 We are waiting, O Timour.

The voice rose desperately at the end and then sank into silence. Clearista felt the tears run down her cheeks; there was a change since last she heard that song. She had sung it with clenched hands and wet angry eyes, hurled it in defiance against the world that despised her, and felt herself so strong and bold as she sang. How she would rush behind the horse-men into the fray and wield her battle-axe with the fiercest of them. But this singer had turned her war song to a dirge, and her hope to a struggling despair. It was the cry of dying and forsaken men, a call for help that never comes, making only more clear and bare the desolation that has hold of them. Clearista's real patriotism, as it was before her false life in Greece, awoke again: she was seized with yearning pity as for a friend in distress, and filled with the desire to go out and help this kinsman, this fellow-Tartar, who had come to her lands to sing her song, and, it almost seemed from the misery of his voice, to die.

Clearista caught Dolore by the arm: "Do come with me," she said; "Nothing will happen: you needn't drink the tea!" She moved forward quickly towards the door of the tent, leaving McClusky and

the few Bengalis who were standing with him. Dolores hesitated for an instant and then followed her : she was quite at a loss to explain her friend's emotion or why there was this sudden reference to tea. She found Clearista standing at the open door and looking in silently at the handful of men who sat inside the tent. They noticed her and returned her look with an indifferent stare.

There was a print of suffering on their faces, suffering that had conquered their courage and brought them to a carelessness or hopelessness about what more might befall. Only the minstrel, who had flung his harp on the ground when he had finished, groaned audibly, and glared fiercely at the foreign woman who doubtless was come to drive them out of her land—as if the land was not theirs as much as hers!

Clearista felt embarrassed and could not collect herself sufficiently to begin a conversation. A feeling of pain came over her, mixed with horror to think that she had once been almost like these people; her great grandfather perhaps actually lived in just such a tent. As she marked the squalor and misery of the whole party, and caught the sullen anger of the minstrel's eyes, her patriotism gave way with a violent reaction. It was too horrible:—she must shut off these degrading remembrances; she would run back to the house, and send McClusky for a policeman immediately. She had already turned, when she caught sight of Dolores standing by her: no one could do a mean or cruel action when Dolores was near. Clearista felt at once how cowardly her intention was, and the disgust gave place again to a sort of passionate tenderness towards people who in all their degradation were still kinsmen of hers, members of the down-trodden and thriftless race which was

yet to rise and triumph over all the earth. Perhaps it was an excess of humility that possessed her, coming in revolt from her pride ; perhaps, together with the old language and the old recollections, a rush came of the self-depreciation and conscious inferiority which had been her usual state of mind till she came to Greece : at any rate she crossed her arms over her breast and bowed low as she went into the tent.

"My brothers are welcome in my country."

It seemed like an age while the men only stared as before. At last one of them got up and motioned her to sit by the fire.

"You have no cup," he said ; "you can take mine."

He took the cup that lay in front of him as he spoke, poured out the dregs, and handed it across to Clearista. Another man caught hold of it on the way and filled it with tea. So much hospitality was a second nature to the men : they discharged it with a mechanical indifference, though, from the look of them, this might well be the last bowl of tea they would ever taste. No one spoke : the Tartars seemed savage and depressed, and Clearista felt herself treated like a mendicant more than a benefactress. She was angry with herself for coming and wished she could get up and go. Yet there was something in her that revolted at the thought of disowning her countrymen now, lightly as she had hitherto done so : and perhaps also some tincture of the Nomad was left in her, something that still delighted to sit under a tent, in spite of years of civilization.

"My brothers have come a long way?"

Apparently they had some difficulty in understanding her : the accent of her village must of course be very different from that of the Eastern Tartars. There was a pause after her speech : then the man who had

been singing replied. She could not follow exactly what he said, but one word that she caught made the blood again mount to her cheeks, and fixed her determination to stay and find out all about these strange wanderers. The minstrel said something about "Gobi": if they had been in Gobi, possibly they might have seen——The Quixotic idea with which she had come to Darjeeling, had been almost forgotten: but this seemed like a miraculous realization of it. A caravan of Tartars from the very region where the Greek city was supposed to be, had come right across Thibet and the Himalayas and camped in her compound. The superstitious spirit of Mozep existed more or less in Clearista: she felt that this was something different from an accident: she almost felt that Mavrones, whom she had tried more or less successfully to look upon as dead, must really be alive somewhere, and wanting only her word to deliver him.

"You have come from the desert of Gobi? What brings you so far?"

"It is very far and a hard journey;" said an older man, whose articulation seemed slower and more distinct:—the same man who had filled her cup with tea. "We were over a hundred when we started, and now this is all that is left of us."

His voice was so sad that Clearista did not answer except by a look. She had not noticed before how haggard and ghastly were the faces of the men round about the tent: but now, as she glanced at one after the other and saw the red fire-light play mockingly upon their ashen pallox and bring out violently the shadows of hollow eyes and cheeks, she felt a cold terror crawling over her arms and chest. It was all a feast of death, a gathering of the ghosts of her early

years come to reproach her unfaithfulness. Then again, just as her courage was about to give way, she caught sight of Dolores standing near her, and her calm returned.

"We were over a hundred men, all armed and well furnished, when we left Gabortong. Then first, as we passed over the poison-Mountain, one man was stifled in the poison and fell over the cliff and died. The next night we were set upon by robbers in the darkness; and many were murdered in their sleep; but the rest of us put our backs against a rock and fought with them till the sun was high; then we beat them off, and our Prince took the sword of their captain. But thirty of us were slain that day. And all the next seven days the wounded men kept dying, for they were weak and lagged behind us; and we dared not stay, but hurried forward, for the robbers had destroyed our provisions, and we feared that we might starve. When we got to Lhasa only forty-three were left. And then the Ruler of Thibet gave us promises, and said he would send an escort to take us among the Pe-ling. But the Legate of the Son of the Sky was jealous, and thought the Thibetans were for conspiring against the Chinese with the Pe-ling. So he took the Ruler and frightened him, and would not let him give us the soldiers. But to us he gave a poisoned feast, and Prince Tolbo went with ten of his chief men; the next day we started from Lhasa, and the day after that they all fell sick and died. And the Prince when he was dying, said these words to me; that, after so many stricken and dead, I should not give up our journey, but go on over the mountains till the last man perished, if we could so see the Ruler of the Pe-ling and save our country from them."

He spoke in a monotonous voice with no emotion

except the despair that seemed naturally to cling about every word and gesture—the sort of voice in which a man condemned to death would read a catalogue of his confiscated goods.

“So we came up to the Himalayas ; and there was a station of guides to give food and drink to merchants who might pass.” But just before we reached it came a messenger from the Legate of the Son of the Sky, and gave a message to the head of the station ; and when we came, the guides took us aside by false ways where there were precipices and gulfs of snow ; and so twenty and one more were lost. And the last died three days back ; he was the father of that boy,” he pointed to a young man in a corner of the tent, “and when his son fell sick he gave him his food and himself fasted : till three days ago he fell suddenly dead in the middle of us.”

He paused again, but Clearista could not shake off the spell that she felt closing about her. The squalid and famished faces all around were turned up in the firelight, watching without interest for the continuation of the story. They knew it all, death by death throughout the catalogue ; and Clearista could not help being affected by their despair. It seemed the natural thing to her to sit there upon the ground, and hear again and again how this man died and how that, and then to wonder who should die next, and how long it would be before they were all gone. Her impressions became indistinct, and wandered as they do in a dream. She felt in some vague sense responsible for all these men had suffered : this was the punishment of her false pride and the desertion of her people. She must sit for ever among the ghosts of her former companions, and hear them telling without reproach or anger how all whom she

could have succoured had died neglected and unseen ; and the burden of remorse on her mind would grow and grow for ever. Then the feeling changed : and all her Greek and English life seemed to have been unreal : she had lived always among the Tartars, but had slept till now, and just waked to hear the last of her race talking of their deaths. The thought of Mavrones was vaguely present all the time, but he seemed only one more of the dead men of whom she was hearing.

"Then we came down from the snow, and travelled hither, for we had one guide who spoke this language. Yesterday some of the Pe-ling met us and would fain make us carry their baggage ; and when we would not, they beat us with staves and killed one of our camels with a gun. And to-day we went to the house of him who rules over the Pe-ling, to give him our Prince's words. But his servants came and said the ruler was away ; so, not believing them, we sat down on the threshold and said that we would stay till he should return. But they drove us from the door and smote us with stones and staves. And after that we found our guide had fled, taking all our stores."

He went on steadily in the same tone, but now Clearista made an effort :

"Who is it you call the ruler of the Pe-ling—Sir Hannibal Cohen ?"

The sound of her own voice, and especially the mention of an English name, seemed to break the spell. She realized herself again to be Clearista, Lady Strathbourne, and no longer the little Tartar girl of the steppes.

"Even he, my daughter : " said the old Mongol : "but he is a proud man and will not hear us. If our Prince was still living. . "

"Stay : I am a Princess here and the ruler of the Pe-ling will obey me." This was an exaggeration, but she felt it to be substantially true: the difference between a Princess and a Countess was not worth dwelling upon to these savages; and she really did feel confident that she could make Sir Hannibal do anything she wished.

"Are you a Princess of the Pe-ling or of the Indians?"

"I am a Tartar, like you, but living among the Pe-ling."

She felt somehow disappointed. They were not awed by her grandeur as a Princess, not touched by her condescension in calling herself a Tartar. If the old man thought about her words, he probably wondered why a Mongol should demean herself by living among the Pe-ling. She went on quickly.

"If you have lost your guide you cannot communicate with the Ruler?"

"No, my daughter: nor have we food to eat, we can only stay here till we die, but we have done our Prince's bidding."

"Tell me your business, and I will speak with the Pe-ling. Meantime if you want any food or clothing, my servants will bring you all."

The old man stood suddenly up. His despair had been so settled before that he did not expect any deliverance till the words of it actually came, and even her last hints had not really entered his understanding. His eyes filled with tears as he cried: "

"The blessing of the Merciful, O my daughter, and the prayers of ten men saved from famine. . . ."

"Please, my lady, I've brought the policeman," interrupted Mc Clusky at the door of the tent.

"Very good, McClusky: tell him to wait and take

a note from me to Sir Hannibal Cohen, as soon as the balloon comes home."

* * * * *

Five days after that the Tartar caravan began to draw up their tent-pegs from the paddock. The men were in better case now; they had rested their camels and obtained a good supply of provisions. They had also, owing to the tact and generosity of that distinguished diplomatist Sir H. Cohen, been provided with letters of recommendation to various influential men among the hill tribes, and with guides to lead them, unless the hill tribes positively forbade it, as far as the frontier of Thibet. Their mission had also been crowned with success, and the depredations of the Dharkal definitely condemned by the English. Like some other tribes of the same standing, the nominally independent Dharkal had two representatives within call of the English minister. Sir Hannibal interviewed them by means of an interpreter: he found his thoughts move more freely in English. "Hay, what the devil?" he shouted, as the ambassadors came to his room: "who's that? what do you mean by coming here? Hay: oh, yes, it's you, is it? Now then: what have you been doing? Can't you answer? Don't stand there like posts:—what do you mean by going and plundering those cursed Tartars? Such a deuce of a distance too—for all I know, you may have been robbing a dozen tribes on the way! . . . Let me tell you, it's something very near rebellion, and you may thank your stars I've not had you hung! . . . And say the English Government encouraged you, too? Look here, you just go back to your Prince or whatever you call him, and tell him that unless he stays in his own country and stops stealing other people's sheep

I'll string him up, that I will, and all his relations with him. Now, be off with you, I can't have you here interrupting me all day, God damn!" Then Sir Hannibal turned round to his writing table, and the interpreter began his translation: "The Great Ruler of the English, is dazzled by the splendour of those entering his palaces so that he calls upon the name of Allah, and cannot tell at first who they are. Nevertheless, seeing how they stood in his presence like palmtrees in a forest, while all others tremble before him, he concludes they can only be the august envoys of the Dharkal, confounders of the terrible and protectors of the poor. He therefore prays you that you will not soil your hands with the possessions of those accursed Tartars, nor go unwarily so long a journey from your country, leaving it unprotected against the assault of the twelve nations whom the Dharkal have subdued, and who sit with the eye of envy turned against the crown of greatness. And he bids you thank Allah, as he does, that you have returned in safety. Moreover he prays that your Prince, or whatever great name would more become his exalted station, will continue in his own realms and watch over the fortunes of the English government, which without his aid is like a sick dog among lions. He salutes your Prince, and praises the name of Allah."

The caravan was ready to start; the tent was packed and the camels harnessed, but the old servant of Prince Tolbo, who led the remains of his expedition, was still in the house talking to Clearista.

"You will remember my friend and try to find him? He has been gone now since the spring."

"Can you not say at all, where he will be—in Gobi or in Thibet?"

"I know nothing but what I have told you : is there no hope ?"

"Nay, my daughter ; if he has travelled Southwards he must have followed one of the regular caravan ways. I will speak to all the men on the roads in Thibet, as we pass them, and bid them spread the news among the other stations."

"But he said he would travel by night for fear of being seen and put to death."

"He could not do it. The only way he could get through from Gobi, would be to join some caravan and travel openly with them. The danger is. . ."

"What is the danger, my father ?"

"If the servants of any great Lama or man in office take him, they will not let him go. It will be very difficult to bring him all along Thibet undiscovered."

"Let all the shepherds on the routes know that I will give great rewards, and will pay back all they spend in saving him besides." •

"It is well, my daughter. I will tell all the men in the stations by the caravan ways in Thibet, and, when I get home, will bid the new prince send to all the Princes of Tartary and the great Mandarins."

"And, if he should travel secretly and hide from the face of men ?"

"Fires shall be lighted on the beacon-hills, and the men shall call on his name morning and evening loudly for three months to come, that you may learn how a Prince of the Tartars is grateful, and how the men of Thibet will work to save a life, in return for Thibetan lives saved from starving."

"You will remember the name and the cry——"

"*Soteria Mavrothes*," repeated the old man carefully. "I have written it down, and will teach it to all the men at the beacons." •

CHAPTER XX.

SAMDA GHU and the Reprobate were riding close together.

"You are determined, father, to take them to the Branchan Rimboochay?"

"That is what we decided from the first. But what else could we do?"

"The Branchan will for certain keep them at Jashi Lumbo and not let them across the frontier."

"Of course he will, but——"

"We shall be imprisoning for life men who have done no wrong."

"A good man can be happy in Thibet as well as in India: it will be no imprisonment. Besides, we could not allow Pe-ling to come to and fro through our country. The Pe-ling are like the sarak tree; they wax so strong and great that they split the land they grow in, and starve out the other trees."

"The more reason, to get rid of them."

"Nay, to forbid them coming, rather; or, at worst, to prevent their going home with knowledge gained in Thibet."

"These men never tried to enter Thibet:—it is you who brought them here. They came to Gobi by China, with the leave of the Son of the Sky."

Samda Ghu was a little staggered by this view of the case: he paused for a minute and then answered:

"Very likely the Bishop will let them go: we can explain to him. . ."

"It is barely possible that some Bishops might, but certainly not the Branchan."

"In any case they are in Thibet now, and we cannot let them go without the leave of a Bishop."

"And shall people say: Behold Samda Ghu, who entrapped strangers in the desert, and took them by force to Thibet, and then for fear of the Bishop kept them in prison for ever?"

Another pause: then the old man replied with a puzzled air:

"My son, what can we do? If they were off our hands I should be glad, for I do not wish to have them in prison, being just men. . ."

"What would you give me, father, if I got them away and over to Bhotan?"

"Nay, child, you would be given up to the anger of the Bishop: for others in the caravan would tell him what you had done."

"And you, what would you say?"

"I would be thankful in secret and think you had done well, but I could do nothing to help you."

"But if I escaped the wrath of the Bishop. . ."

"Speak no more of such wild things!"

"Would you receive me back after half a year?"

"My son, I cannot make compacts that you may break the laws lightly: nevertheless I shall be among the Gylongs of Kouroui Duk for half a year:—and there many men come as disciples and are received."

The two rode on in silence for five minutes or more: Sāmda Ghu was beginning to feel out of his depth, as he often did in conversations with his pupil. The idea that he was doing wrong to the strangers, and doing it in a treacherous way, had been preying on his mind for some time past, but it had never struck him before that it was he who had originally brought them into

the forbidden country. He might find that the Bishop would have scores to settle with himself as well as with the foreigners. He was a nervous man, and his feelings were divided between pleasure at finding out his disciple's sympathy with his own view, and discomfort at being forced to face a real difficulty and form something very like a conspiracy,—he, the most reputable of men! He only hoped the Reprobate would not take him into his confidence. The wish was scarcely formed, when the Reprobate suddenly began :

“ My father, listen : I have a plan to . . . ”

“ Let those who have plans keep them in silence ! ” replied Samda Ghu with amazing rapidity.

“ I will say nothing of my plans—I have abandoned them. Can you give me fifteen ounces of silver before the evening ? ”

“ Why should you want silver ? It is not as if you were going to leave the caravan. ”

“ Things which must be done, my father, are done better by those who have silver. A man who must needs travel fast wants wherewith to pay guides and hosts. ”

The old man began to feel the plot-interest growing upon him : but his cautious and quiet habits asserted themselves.

“ A man without friends can travel but slowly in a strange country. If many pursue him, he is soon taken. ”

“ The men who cried on the mountain are my friends : they will give me guides and keep off those who chase me. The friends of the Pe-ling. . . ”

“ Hush my son ; I will not hear anything more. . . There is a box in Khrat-wood among my baggage, in it are twenty ounces of silver. You remember the look of it ? ”

"Is your camel swifter than the camel of the tall Pe-ling, my father?"

"It is better and stronger: but the camel that was Kuda's before he died, and now carries packs,—that is swifter still."

* * * * *

When the caravan camped that evening, Samda Ghu, the other priest, the Reprobate, Ghiemba, Mavrones and Baj, pitched their tent at the extreme rear. They had been in advance of the rest in the morning, but many things had occurred to detain them during the day, provoking little accidents or mistakes which made them halt needlessly.

They sat down to supper as usual, but conversation flagged. Baj and Mavrones noticed a sort of uneasiness in the manner of their companions, especially of Samda Ghu. They tried to get up a chat with him in Mongol; but it was no use. He was too absent and preoccupied to listen to what they were saying, and it was quite a relief, when, about three hours after sundown, he and the middle Lama went out together to speak to some one at the front of the caravan. They had scarcely left the tent, when the Reprobate made a sign to Ghiemba. The Mongol boy rose excitedly, and crossed over to where Mavrones was sitting.

"Do you know where they are taking you?" he asked quickly.

"To the Branchan Rimboochay . . ."

"Who allows no foreigners to enter Thibet: if they have come in, he keeps them in prison till they die."

"I know that is usual, but in our case . . ."

"It will be just the same. Samda Ghu is powerless to help you. There is only one way to escape to your country again."

"What on earth do you mean by all this, Ghiemba?"

"Did you hear the cry of the beacon-men? They were calling upon you by name."

"Good God! I thought it sounded like my name. How could they have known . . ."

"*Sotiria Mavrones*;" said the Reprobate, imitating the sounds the shepherds had taught him the night before. He had been able to follow roughly the drift of the conversation.

"*Deliverance Mavrones!* They must have heard of me from a Hellen . . ."

"From a Tartar Princess living among the Pe-ling in India."

"A Tartar Princess! How did you hear all this?"

"These are the words of my master,"—he pointed to the Reprobate—"who went last night among the shepherds on the beacon hill to learn the meaning of the cry. They told him."

"But how did they know?"

"From the men of Prince Tolbo, who went . . ."

"Yes; I know about Prince Toibo."

" . . . from Lhasa on to Hindustan among the Pe-ling. The Prince and most of his followers died on the way: the few who were left came among the Pe-ling, and were beaten and robbed, and were about to die, when a Pe-ling woman came and spoke to them in Mongol and gave them food: and, being a princess, compelled the Ruler of the Pe-ling to listen to their desires. So they made ready to return: and the princess told them a friend of hers was gone, with one companion, to seek a sacred city in Gobi, and was coming back through Thibet secretly by night over the snows . . ."

"Good Heavens—it must be Clarista!"

"I do not know her name . . . this friend she besought them to save and bring safely over to India. So they departed, and left word with the men at the road-stations, and on the beacon hills, telling them the story and bidding them cry the cry — *Soteria Mavrones*."

Mavrones sat dumbfounded at the strange vista of ideas called up by this story. Usually the politest of men he did not even notice Baj's amused question: "What on earth is exciting you so much, Mav? Are they going to elect you Grand Lama?" He looked fixedly at Ghiemba, and then at the Reprobate, and asked:

"What token have I that your story is true?"

"Only this—it is stranger that we should invent. But listen, you can hear the noise of yaks and mules: my master has made an agreement with the beacon men, and that is a band of the shepherds ready to take you . . . Come out, harness your camel; and if you do not believe me, question them."

"I can't suddenly break away from this caravan and from Samda Ghu, and fly, I know not whither, with strange men who may be robbers."

"Samda Ghu knows you are to fly, but wishes to be clear from the blame of helping you. He is an old man and holy, and will not be made ashamed before the Bishop . . . My master and I will go with you among the shepherds."

"What is your motive in doing this?"

"I go because I must follow him; why he goes I know not."

A silence followed, broken only by the faint noises coming from the camels outside, and the grunting of a few yaks, apparently belonging to the shepherds who were said to be waiting near. Mavrones looked

into the fire and pondered. The boy's story was more than strange: yet at each point where it could be tested it appeared true. "*Soteria Mavrones*":—that certainly was the beacon cry last evening: besides it was quite impossible that Thibetans should be able to invent a Greek word. That part of the story was incontestable . . . Then Clearista: it must be she—though why she should be called a Tartar princess was hard to explain. Perhaps she said she was not English, and the Tartars concluded she must be Tartar . . . that part of the story no doubt had been distorted and made marvellous by passing through many hands . . . It *must* have been Clearista: no one else could know all about his journey, and his ridiculous project for running by night through Thibet; and he somehow felt that no one else would care enough about his fate to send this strange message over such an enormous tract of country. There was something Quixotic about the idea which was like Clearista—and then it was so exactly like her to forget Wibbling entirely, and only remember Baj for a quarter of a sentence . . . If Samda Ghu had given his countenance to the tale, Mavrones would have harnessed his camel and started without hesitation; yet it did really look as if the old Lama must know of the plan: he had never gone out and stayed out, like this, on any previous night during the journey. He must be intentionally giving them an opportunity to escape, at the same time as he avoided in any way compromising himself with the Bishop. . . . "

"Baj, listen. Clearista is in India and has sent news of us by means of Prince Tolbo's embassy to the beacon-men on all the roads from Gobi to Thibet. They were calling out last night upon me by name—*Σωτηρία Μανρώνης*. There are shepherds

outside with yaks and mules ready to take us over to Nepal."

"What do you mean? Is this a new style of joke?"

"No:—this is Ghiemba's story, but I am sure it is true." (Poor Ghiemba—happily he did not see the unconscious irony!) "Samda Ghu has gone out to give us time to escape without being implicated himself. . . . I believe this is our one chance of freedom: if we don't catch at it, we are doomed for ever to the prisons of the Branchan Rimboochay."

"It is too sudden. We must have time to look into the whole story. . . ."

"In half an hour we may be too late. Harness your camel and come out to see the shepherds.—I will explain the whole story, on the way.—We'll cross-examine the shepherds, and, if you are not satisfied, we'll come back. There is no risk so far."

"Stop, Mav: it may, for all we know, be a plot to . . ."

"If so, Ghiemba and the Reprobate are in it. It is just a question whether we trust them or not."

"Then let us go. I trust them absolutely."

That was the last word: all that remained for the execution of such a momentous project was to put together a few rolls of baggage, untie the camels and start. As a matter of fact, this was already done. The Reprobate had fastened up the luggage and provisions as was done every morning before the start; he had loosed and harnessed five camels, among them Kuda's and Samda Ghu's; and finally an open Khratwood box in the corner showed he had not forgotten his ingots of silver. The resolution of flight once taken, nobody seemed at all discomposed or conscious of an unusual step. They moved about quietly, and

looked in a systematic every-day manner for little necessities that might have been forgotten: Mavrones characteristically noticed that the fire was low, and put on more fuel; then all four went out to where the camels were, undid the tethers, and rode away silently. It was not till Mavrones looked back and saw the gleam of the camp-fire flickering from the deserted tent, that he realized the suppressed excitement that made his hand tremble and his heart beat audibly. He said nothing, but followed the Reprobate up a side valley, guided by the occasional grunt of a yak or the noise of stamping hoofs from the place where the shepherds were waiting.

* * * * *

Samda Ghu and the other priest came back rather tired after their round of nocturnal visits. The latter was cross as well;—he could not make out why Samda Ghu should want to pay so many calls all in one evening, and stay so long too. At any rate the old Lama might have let him go home by himself, and get to sleep: it was all very inconsiderate. The fire was almost out and the tent in some disorder; their companions seemed to have gone out paying calls also. That was the worst of the Reprobate; you never could tell whether he would not suddenly be inspired to conduct a picnic or a riding competition at the dead of night.

"Ghiemba," shouted Samda Ghu, "where are you? I want the fire made up."

No answer came from Ghiemba, and the other priest was too sullen to offer any remark. Samda Ghu felt that his trial was upon him.

"A Reprobate in a camp is a thorn and a distress," he remarked with feeling. "Doubtless he has taken the others abroad with him in a foolish path."

The sullen and sleepy one did not deign to answer either the general sentiment or the particular conclusion. Samda Ghu sat down by the fire and waited : he was rather glad of his companion's want of sympathy. It eased his mind of the deceit he was practising.

"Come, my son," he said, breaking the silence at length ; "you are tired, and that through my thoughtlessness. It is indeed shameful that an old man should keep a young late awake with his visits. Go and sleep : I will watch by the fire till the froward ones return."

He spoke gently, and the priest was softened. He smiled in answer, and even offered to keep watch himself ; then he went off to his corner of the tent and proceeded to roll himself up in blankets.

"Good night, my father," he said as he settled himself ; "I hope you will not have to wait long."

"Good night, my son."

Samda Ghu sat still by the fire till the other's monotonous breathing testified that he was asleep. The old priest was repeating prayers in a scarcely audible whisper : he found a certain comfort in the mechanical exercise, and went on, prayer after prayer, hardly noticing what the words were, and never definitely realizing how long he meant to stay there waiting for those who would not return. After an hour's watching he got up and walked to the door of the tent, and peered into the dark landscape for traces of the departed friends. He was of course glad they had got away : yet he could not help wishing earnestly that some chance would turn them back to the caravan again. He was lonely without his favourite disciple : and the two strangers had somehow won a place in the old man's heart. ~~It was~~ It was miserable to be left alone.

with this one sullen priest, alone in the possession of a secret which to a mind such as Samda Ghu's was almost a crime. Bred and nourished upon respectability, Samda Ghu's conscience was sore and aching at the feeling of complicity in a plot—and what was worse, a plot for eluding the just claims of a Bishop! The old priest was unhappy as he sat past midnight crouched over the dying fire, and two tears that rolled down his cheek made a queer melancholy hiss on the embers.

CHAPTER XXI.

PERHAPS it would seem more friendly if we accompanied Mavrões and Bāḡ in their journey westward, up and down their mountains and ravines, across their torrents and snowy passes, and, most dangerous of all, across the official bridges built by the Thibetan government, making detours to avoid Tudjung and Punukka and evade, if possible, the Episcopal suspicion; till at last we should reach the line of little posts with flapping banners which marks the Southern frontier of Thibet, and feel ourselves safe to travel like peaceable foreigners in the territory of the Rajah of Bhotan. Yet it is a dull and disagreeable journey: the only good reason for undertaking it would be a desire to serve our friends, and I strongly opine they would be better off without us. Not only would the acquisition of two such poor mountaineers as you and I are be a questionable gain to any party, and, as the poet puts it "a profitless consumption of bread:" besides all that, it is generally confirmed by experience, that, the more people there are running away from a Bishop, the more likely he is to catch one of them.

Perhaps, therefore, on the whole, the best we can do is to ignore the details of those few dreary weeks, and content our friendly feelings by going to meet the travellers at the end of their journey. It is rather fortunate that we find ourselves in Thibet, that land of wisdom and mystery. All we need do

is to go to a friendly Mahatma and ask him to waft us in a trance across the Himalayas to—well, let us say, for the sake of convenience, to the North East terminus of the Great Jeejeebhoy Railway, if possible, in the neighbourhood of a comfortable inn. This, I feel sure will be the best place to go to; at any rate, it is where Lord Strathbourne and his wife have gone, and one may generally have confidence in following Clearista.

She took her decision upon the spur of the moment. A runner sent on by the Reprobate had arrived at Darjeeling and announced the strange success of the beacon call; the two Englishmen were already on the further frontier of Bhotan when the runner left them, and would probably be only a day or two behind him at that moment. Clearista immediately gave orders to pack three portemanteaux; and, as soon as her husband came down from his balloon, explained her decision to him. It was obviously the proper thing for them to go as far as the rail would carry them, to meet the two men whose lives they had been instrumental in saving. Besides that, they were old friends of hers; and then, they would be quite celebrities in London when they returned.

The result is, that Clearista is sitting in the veranda of a little inn, a mile or two above that last station, whatever its name is: it is so difficult to remember the names of foreign railway stations. She is sitting in the veranda here, with the light fluffy thing over her head, just as she sat in the veranda of St. Nicholas last spring and looked out on the laughing Arganthian bay. The scene she looks at now is very different: it is solemn, this, and rich and melancholy: all the North, ringed with those remorseless mountains, that seem, on such an

Afternoon as this, like formless giants battling against one another with grey snows and mists and thunder-clouds: the South sinking to a long marshy jungle, thick brakes and wildernesses of dark green and brown and treacherous brightness, where an ignorant foreigner may fancy all the angry beasts in the world glaring from their beds of rushes or writhing swiftly through the high dense grass. Between us and that jungle, thank goodness, there are long stretches of cultivated land: some crop or other—I should not wonder if it was maize—has just been harvested, and the sparse fields of stubble come quite as a relief to the eye. The garden of the inn is a relief too—the work of a good Yorkshireman, who could never overcome his prejudice against foreign trees, and tried to make his new plantation in Bengal look as much as possible like his old one in the North Riding. The rest, at least all the low southern ground, is half painful to an English eye, too thronged with growth and richness, and mellowed to that utmost point which leaves nothing to expect in the future except decay. That is all very different from the sunny freshness and light salt air of the island where we met. Clearista first. Nevertheless, as she sits on the balcony now with closed eyes, she feels strangely like her former self, and can almost imagine she hears the prattle of Arganthian waters and the buzz of the bees over the little summer-house. She had often sat just like this in the veranda there, watching the sun verge to his fall, waiting for a step on the gravel under the archway and a voice breaking the stillness pleasantly from across the lawn: a step that always turned towards her when the light became too dim in the library, a voice that roused and answered hers for many a happy hour through the changing lights.

And now too she was waiting for the same voice, and half trembling at the expectation of it, with a sort of nervous shrinking she did not quite dare to understand. She told herself she was happy: of course she was happy: it was a pleasure such as she could never expect again, to welcome back a friend who seemed to have vanished for ever out of her life — almost out of life itself — and to think that it was she who had saved him. There was an element of real joy in that, but it was not the dominant feeling in possession of her. Clearista had been unfortunate in her misdoings; most people can cultivate a little duplicity, a little levity and cowardice, a little of that ludicrous miscalculation of values which is called worldliness, and never have any particular reason to regret their sins. But a few violated sanctities had taken a terrible revenge on her.

She only realized this dimly: her state of mind was too painful for her to probe. Curiously enough the thought of her marriage as an embarrassment never occurred to her. Deeper gulfs than that seemed to separate her from the sympathy she wanted, gaps of which she had been conscious a year ago in the Arganthian garden. She never allowed herself to repine at her marriage, she intentionally dwelt on the comfort and material advantages it brought. Without a carriage, and a yacht, and plenty of travel, and a balloon to send her husband in, she constantly told herself, life would really be an intolerable affair. She had got the real prizes of the world.

In this stern self-illusion she sat now on the veranda, and told herself she was composed and happy. But in reality underneath the excitement and expectation, her whole mind was aching with an old regret, and

her overstretched nerves could not regain their elasticity.

How was she to meet him again? . . . Clearista was almost sorry she had sent her husband away for the day, though the sending had cost her a certain amount of trouble. It involved a little dishonesty as well—one of those semi-conscious plots which were characteristic of Clearista. As soon as she arrived at the terminus of the Great Jeejeebhoy Railway, she sent a special messenger forward to enquire for the English travellers. As soon as he met them and gave them news where she and her husband were expecting them, he was to return with all haste and report their progress. This messenger had returned the day before, and brought word that the caravan would arrive this particular evening. So far, all was clear: but there were two roads by which they might possibly come. Clearista made due enquiries about these roads and ascertained that one of them was quite out of the question; then she proceeded to convince herself that her friends would certainly come by it, and sent her husband off that way to meet them. She saw him off in the morning, and then, without any consciousness of inconsistency, sat down and congratulated herself that, at any rate, he would not be there to make the meeting more difficult.

Yet now she was decidedly sorry he had gone: she would have liked a little constraint, something to make a scene quite impossible. After all, she was not to meet him alone; that was one comfort. Alone, she could not answer for anything: she might burst into tears or make herself ridiculous.

She got up and walked along the veranda. The slight effort and the fresh warm wind restored her calm and gave her a certain feeling of indifference. . .

She would show she was glad to see him when he came—moderately glad—very glad. She would walk down to the gate and wave her handkerchief. She would stand there under the shrinking silver birch that leant over the little wicket and seemed to feel itself a foreigner in a haughty land. She would stand and wait, holding her cloud round her head with her left hand—a becoming attitude. She would call a welcome to him as soon as he dismounted: he would run up to her, she thought, and hold out both hands. . . . Should she notice that? No: one hand was enough: the other would be engaged in holding the cloud. She would only give him one hand; but still she would be as friendly as possible, certainly avoiding anything like stiffness. . . . He would say something about owing her his life: he is sure to say something of that sort. She would answer playfully: there was really nothing to be sentimental over. Yet she must not be unfeeling. No: she would say how often she had thought of him, and even feared he might be dead, and reproach him for running wilfully into danger against her advice. . . . That was a good way of putting it—"against her advice." Then she would turn to his friend, the tall man with the odd name, and chide him for risking Mr. Mavrones' life in such a . . . no: that would never do. It was putting too exclusive a value on Mr. Mavrones. . . . It was quite foolish, she reflected, to plan over an interview beforehand: things never turned out as you expected them. One thing was certain: she must begin as soon as possible to talk over the results of the expedition, and what the city was like. At any rate she would know what to say when the time came. Then they would go to the house, and she would apologise for her husband's absence, and explain that

he had gone The train of thought stopped abruptly : there was the caravan close to her !

She had turned in her walk on the veranda, and suddenly caught sight of it, coming round a clump of trees scarcely a hundred yards away. She clutched the railing nervously and looked at the curious procession, her pale face all fired with excitement, and the cloud flying off her head in the evening breeze. In an instant she had noticed all the members of the caravan : a man and a boy in Thibetan dress ; a Bhotea guide riding in front ; at the back, an Englishman. Her eye rested on this last for a moment and a tremor ran through all her frame. Mavrones was not so tall as that, not so strongly built : it was his friend riding alone ! A swarm of wild surmises fluttering in her brain, she watched the whole party pass the little clump of trees one by one : till at last, right at the back, the head of another camel made its appearance, hobbling slowly round the clump. Her heart leaped as she espied it, with a rush of gratitude to destiny : but, as the camel came slowly into view, she saw there was no rider. The animal was only carrying packs, and Baj was leading it by a halter.

The idea of the caravan arriving without Mavrones had never occurred to her : she had never thought of it apart from him, and her imagination leaped violently at the worst explanation of his absence. She dropped, as if struck by a spell, into the long cane seat that happened to be near her. The whole scene swam before her eyes : she could see nothing, caravans nor trees nor mountains nor sky : only with a disordered vividness, her sight rested on one trivial object, the end of a little lace handkerchief which happened to have caught her hand. She noticed it mechanically, but with astonishing minuteness ; every thread seemed

to stand out like a rope, and the pattern became glaring and aggressive. She dared not criticize the terrible suggestion that Mavrones' absence had put into her mind, nor try for hope's sake to believe it false. She let the cruel belief sink into her mind unquestioned: she did not venture to restore her own faith, lest the second disappointment should be too appalling. The momentary fear seemed quickly to become familiar to her and settle down into an accepted fact. He had died upon the journey as she knew he would die from the first!

All excitement had fallen away from her: she scarcely felt any pain at the sudden blow. She was in that curious state of feeling which ordinary people experience chiefly after physical wounds, a sense of comparative ease and rest, tempered by the consciousness that one slight movement will bring a spasm of agony. Clearista refrained from touching or moving the wounded part of her.

In a moment or two this phase of feeling had permanently deepened. She got up from her cane chair and began to walk towards the gate. She noticed that her cloud had blown away, and was flapping up and down on a rail of the veranda. She turned back, captured it and threw it round her head. The caravan was just at the gate now—she must run down the lawn in time to meet it.

The exaggerated clearness with which she had just now marked every twist in the little lace handkerchief, extended itself to the whole scene before her. Clouds and trees and blades of grass, all were cuttngly sharp in outline and brilliant in colour; every tuft of hair on those five camels stood out and stamped itself on Clearista's mind.

Baj had already jumped down from his camel by

the time she reached the gate. She had wanted to be the first to call a greeting, but the effort of taking an initiative was beyond her just now. He came forward, smiling and excited :

"I am so glad, Lady Strathbourne—we can never repay you : but for you we should certainly be in prison or hung by now—It is such happiness to be back. . . ."

"It is a great pleasure to me to see you safe home again," she answered quietly, giving him her hand. "You know I can't allow you to thank me too much—it was only a piece of good fortune, my happening to meet the Mongols."

"I am afraid I shall remain very grateful all the same, more grateful than I can ever say."

"You must have suffered dreadfully?"

"O, it was not very bad—at least not lately : in Thibet the cold was really fearful now and again. When I think of the miserable life we should have had. . . ."

"I am so anxious to hear all about it. Did you see Lhasa? I hope you did."

"No ; we were two or three days journey off when we came across the beacon-men : then we broke off from the caravan, you know. . . . this is the friend who arranged our escape : next to you we owe our lives to him."

"More to him than to me, I suspect," she said with a smile to the Reprobate, on whose foreign ears the compliment was of course wasted.

She stopped speaking, and an uncomfortable silence followed. . Baj was moved and expansive quite contrary to his wont, but he felt himself thrown back and discouraged by something chill and unreal in his reception. Clearista's words seemed to him so fluent

and *banales*, he felt ashamed of having betrayed any emotion himself. Clearista too was struck by her own ease of manner, but the light tone of the conversation had begun to pain her. *She* might be cheerful; it was her duty. But how could anyone else, how, most of all, could this friend and fellow-traveller talk to her carelessly about the journey on which Mavrones had died. It was too coarse and heartless, she thought: yet the sting of it gave her nerve for an effort. She would know the worst at once.

"When did. . did you have any accident on the way?"

"Accident? oh, none to speak of. Mavrones' mule fell over a precipice once, a day or two after we started; that was the only serious thing. How is Lord Strathbourne?"

"He was killed, was he? Let me know it all!"

The change in her voice and manner suddenly struck Baj; he looked up and saw the large eyes full of pain, and the pale face drawn with suspense. The look startled him for a moment, then he answered quickly: "Killed? who? No; Mavrones is all right. The mule was killed of course, but he wasn't riding it."

"Why isn't he with you?" She spoke still with constraint, and as if she feared the answer.

"Oh, he went on in front about an hour ago. He wanted to telegraph to his father, and come back here afterwards."

"Mr. Mavrones always thinks a great deal of his father."

She was reminded of a conversation she had had last year in the Arganthian summer-house, and she spoke almost with bitterness. Baj did not understand her feeling, and hesitated what to reply.

"Will you go up to the house?" she said, after a moment; "I will just walk up to the veranda with you, and then come back and wait for my husband; he had gone out to meet you, but I suppose you missed each other on the way."

"Did he really? I am so sorry—we must have missed him. Pray, don't trouble to come up to the house with me; I ought to take the camels round to the stable first, and see about lodging them."

"Oh, yes. I forgot the camels. I hope there won't be any difficulty about them."

He went back to consult the Reprobate upon the subject, and also to settle accounts with the guide. Clearista stayed where she was under the slender birch boughs, leaning on the little gate with her right arm and holding the blowing cloud with her left. Things were better than she had dreaded, after all. It was unreasonable to be so pained at Mavrones' placing her after his father: of course he must care more for his father than for a friend like her. Yet there was a sting in the thought, which called back the melancholy unsatisfied resignation of half an hour ago. She watched listlessly while Ghiemba and the Reprobate led the camels round to the back of the inn, and followed with her eyes the picturesque figure of the guide, as he rode away after receiving his money, past the clump of trees where the road turned. There was something sad, she thought, in starting like that, just at the fall of darkness, away into solitary places leaving a lighted house behind. Yet no doubt he was only going as far as the next village: there was nothing really sad about it except in her own fancy.

A light wind played in the branches of the little birch tree, and two or three delicate leafy sprays

bowed rhythmically down till they touched her hair. She looked up at the silvery trunk and delicate shadow of the tree standing clearly out against the cloudy horizon. That looked sad too, she thought, sad beyond measure; yet there was a curious peace and gentleness in it, nothing harsh or sickly or querulous. If she could only bear her grief like that, it would be almost—— She smiled at her own fancy; it was rather absurd, at her age, to become sentimental about a tree. Yet as she looked upwards again and traced the white and grey shades, and listened to the rustling song of the mobile branches, there was a sort of sympathy in the tree after all.

"At last I have found you!" cried a voice from the road: "I lost my way coming up from the town and found myself riding off to Thibet again."

She looked up, startled and weak, not quite daring to meet his eye. He had dismounted and come close to the gate without her seeing him: as she looked up, he saw that his laughing tone jarred upon her.

"Clearista, I owe you my life and all I have: there is no one in the world to whom I would owe it sooner."

He held out both his hands earnestly, and she gave him hers without a touch of hesitation. Her resolutions had all fallen away.

"I wish I could have given my life to save yours, and I wish I could give it now. Go up to the house and leave me."

" O, where confideth
 The heavy-hearted,
 When hope's departed,
 And love abideth ;
 When he sighs no more,
 But his hunger hideth :
 What hath life in store ? "

" With passing fleetness
 Years change and spurn us ;
 And Time can turn us
 The sour to sweetness :
 I keep, love foiled,
 My life's completeness :
 Much is yet unspoiled. "

" To tears nor laughter
 Let these things stir thee :
 Love is not worthy
 To sorrow after.
 Nor strive nor sigh :
 ' With a rope and rafter
 Man can always die.
 He fears no peril,
 Who, griefless, mirthless,
 Knows life how worthless,
 And love how sterile :
 And the scorn of his heart
 's a charmed beryl.
 That's the wise man's part. "

" Are love and sorrow
 To buy and sell with ?
 To traffic well with,
 To lend and borrow ?
 My life to-day
 To win thine to-morrow—
 Is it gift or pay ?
 Though none shall love me,
 My love is blessed :
 It reigns confessed
 As God above me
 One star mine own
 Through the night to move me ;
 Great is love unknown ! "

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE are places where nine months make a great deal of difference, and places where they make practically no difference at all. If we go back now to Porthcarno we shall see the beach, and the long street, and the cave and the little black rocks, looking very much the same in Autumn as they did last Spring. If we were in the habit of going up inland among the market gardens, the wilderness of cabbages and cauliflowers, and the one ever-memorable field, where, so tradition whispers, under the baleful fertilization of hollyhocks the brocoli came up pink; we should no doubt see the change in the vegetation and mark the hectic fever hues of Autumn on the trees that had just begun to sprout last spring. But on the beach everything looks the same: even the visitors are the same. Old Mavrones has come to spend his Christmas vacation again in the same place, and Aunt Martha's rheumatism has again sought solace in the warmth of a South Cornish winter. What an excitement there was in the breasts of the two children when they heard the old Greek scholar was coming to Porthcarno again. They had gone down to two trains to meet him; they had carried up one very small bag between them: they had invited themselves to tea at his lodgings, and shown various other marks of distinguished favour. Madge had asked many questions about the errant son in the desert of Gobi; but the old man had no news since the letter Mavrones

wrote, many months before, from the confines of the Sulphur Lake.

The three were sitting together on some low rocks on the beach. The old man had just finished telling a story. It was a fairy story with a good deal in it about cats, and cats always had a charm for Madge. So, for that matter, had postmen: and, as soon as the story was finished, she made a dash off to greet one of those functionaries, who was in the act of knocking at Aunt Martha's door.

"There's nothing for you, Miss; but there's two for the old French gentleman."

"Here he is, down on the beach; I'll take them to him. But you mustn't call him French, because he's not, and the French are a deceitful nation." It was pretty easy to detect in Madge's conversation plagiarisms from Aunt Martha's gnomic wisdom.

In flagrant violation of his official duties, the postman gave her the two packets, one a very fat letter, the other a telegram.

"That might have come on last night," he remarked casually, "only, as it came all the way from India, we thought there couldn't be any particular hurry. So I waited till this morning."

This appearing a reasonable course of action, Madge ran down contentedly to the old man and gave him the two messages.

The telegram bore an Indian postmark; he started up as he read it, and handed it with a cry of happiness to the children. Digby first took it away from Madge, then Madge took it away from Digby; then it appeared that Madge could not read writing, so it was handed back to the old man as a sort of intermediary.

"Baj and I safe Wibbling probably safe success enormous—Mavrones."

He read it again and again, with tears half rising to his eyes. He had had many an anxious day and night these last few months and had often awoke in the morning with a sense of grief which it took him a minute or two to find reason for. And the reason always was his son's danger. Now he felt the sort of delighted happiness which, as a rule, only children can sympathise with.

He jumped Madge up in his arms and kissed her for very pleasure.

"So he hasn't been eaten," remarked Digby in a judicial tone; "I think I'm rather glad."

The other letter was almost forgotten, had not Digby called attention to it. It came from Peking and was written in Greek. It was absurdly overweight, and, in spite of the postman's forgetfulness to-day, to-morrow Her Majesty's Government intended to claim eighteen pence for carrying it. As the letter was opened, there fell out of it a photograph and a card. The photograph represented a well-looking stout man in a tarbouche with a good-natured expression and a theatrical scowl. The card bore a remarkable inscription, and a signature evidently not in the same hand.

* "In consideration of unrivalled experients in China Tartary and the Desert, I give it as my firmest

* A learned friend whom the author consulted on some of the obscurities of this advertisement, sends the following note: "*Fought*: mixture of *fetched* and *brought*. *Longest*: most durable: *ungainly*: not gainful, 'positively losing money.' *Dearest* as a term of recommendation presents a difficulty. It may be a mistake for *cheapest*, but more likely is to be taken literally. I once recommended a Levantine merchant's wares as 'cheap.

and unprejudiced pinion. The Silks who Mr. Mozep Kiarsk has fought with him from Persia Turkestan and Eastern Russia are the best dearest and longest of China and all the world. Superfine! Shawls, curtains, close. Merchands who hold back are positively ungainly.

"This is my candied conviction. I am jiggered if I don't!

"Yours truly,

"THOMAS MARMADUKE WIBBLING."

The letter would possibly throw some light upon this obscure testimonial: the old man opened it, and read the Greek of which the following is a translation.

"EGREGIOUS SIR,

"Having been at one time the most esteemed friend of your amiable son, I write to give you the fullest possible news of his fate, and that of the expedition he so generously led. In case your feelings overcome you in the course of my letter, I beg you to look at the end. But, if possible, I should prefer you to read it straight through.

"At the end of a journey from Russia through Siberia and down by caravan to China, I found myself in Peking. Naturally the object of much attention in that intelligent metropolis, I happened to hear of an Englishman who was suffering from a fever and being supported at the cost of a very large sum of money a day, by my friend, His Excellency Man-sse-

and good.' Next day the merchant called in a state of indignation. 'Why was I trying to beat him down? If I said the things were cheap, his customers would insist upon low prices: say they were dear, and they would give him twice as much.' He was eventually satisfied by a testimonial: 'wares of first-rate quality, but prices exorbitant.'"

Kong. Hearing his name, Wee-pee-ling, I concluded it must be the third member of your son's party, with whom I had shared the benefits of mutual intimacy. I determined to visit him.

"I called in my best clothes at the place where he was confined. The porter refused to let me enter : said the Englishman was mad ; that his disease was infectious ; that His Excellency had forbidden any person to see him. I knew the last statement to be inaccurate ; and, seeing the man very stout, and his family all living with him, I suspected he was acquiring unjust gains by keeping Mr. Wibbling in confinement.

"How few of us, like the Holy Pandolf, have sufficient religion to keep us always in the path of duty !

"Acting upon these suspicions I took the most courageous and honourable course." Courage, my dear friend, and honour, are two of my distinguishing characteristics.

"I opened my eyes wide and frowned at the porter : who immediately showed signs of timidity. Stamping my foot upon the ground and crossing my arms, I demanded in a voice of thunder to be shown to the sick man ! The porter, terrified by my firmness, shut the door in my face and retired.

"Next day, when I renewed my visit, the coward had left his post. By means of a small fee to his son I obtained admission and found Mr. Wibbling walking in a garden.

"Need I describe the mutual joy of that meeting ? The treasures of friendship are never so valuable, as when they have been temporarily lost.

"Mr. Wibbling was not only in sound mind but in excellent health also. The porter had told him he

was kept in custody by Man-sse-kong's orders; the pretence of sickness was only used to deceive Man-sse-kong and myself. It appears the porter spent upon Mr. Wibbling only one-third of the allowance, and supported his own family with the other two-thirds. Mr. Wibbling had of course chafed greatly at his confinement, and had solaced his leisure hours by writing a letter to the 'Times.'

"He tells me that, before they arrived at the Greek city, they stayed in the house of a certain Englishman who had made himself the chief of a people called "Sanni:" though I fear his account of this personage is somewhat confused. While they were staying in the Chief's house there was a rebellion among the Sanni. The rebels were perfectly successful. They put the king to death in a certain cave, and sacked the Palace. Mr. Wibbling himself, after a determined fight against superior numbers, in which he killed at least a dozen savages, was captured, and tied up in the same cave to drown. He managed eventually to free himself, and attempted without success to free the king, whom he found already dead in another part of the cave. He appears to feel a certain compunction for not having attempted to rescue the king sooner.

"Such is the sensitiveness of a really bold nature. I myself have felt it. May St. Avgar keep us always from the fault of procrastination!

"Your son and Mr. Baj had gone for an expedition up a mountain when the insurrection broke out. Mr. Wibbling fears they must certainly have been killed. The whole country was in the hands of the rebels, and it is not considered likely that they can have escaped into the desert. (If too much moved, see below.) Cruelly murdered by infuriated savages: a pitiable end to the flower of youth and the enthusiasm of

generous devotion! Mr. Wibbling considered there was no hope.

"It is only by remembering the sufferings of the Holy Aloysius that we can bear with meekness the loss of sons and friends!

"On hearing Mr. Wibbling's story, I determined to deliver him from his confinement. He demanded that I should sign a letter written by him to say that he was perfectly well in mind and body, a letter to be shown to Man-sse-kong. In return for this kind office, I induced him to sign the enclosed card recommending my silks. I wrote the recommendation in English myself, being exceptionally familiar with that language.

"Imagine the consternation of the porter, when, brandishing my certificate in his face, I went out again into the courtyard. He had plotted with all the most desperate malefactors in Pekin to assassinate me: but he was not proof against the eye of Mozep Kiarsk! I went to him, I who write, and looked him in the face! One glance was enough, and the would-be assassin stepped back with a guilty smile to let me pass. A knot of miscreants, who were his confederates in the plot, were standing round the gate as I emerged.

"Looking about me with a hurried scowl, I kept them at bay while I ran with all speed to the residence of the nearest policeman, who accompanied me to Man-sse-kong. Need I add more? Courage and devotion have won the day. I have restored the eminent Wibbling to liberty and his native land. He leaves for England in a week.

"And your son:—do not a father's tears sully this finely written page as you read it? A father's tears? Then where is Mozep Kiarsk? He who

has set the captive at liberty, shall he not, by the grace of the Holy Sarkara, also dry the tears of the afflicted?

"I have by diligence and good fortune met with some merchants, most acute men, who have lately come from Koun-boum. They inform me that they there encountered a certain caravan going to Thibet, which had picked up two persons in a strange dress like my own: (the ignorant Chinese of the interior are unacquainted with European dress!) that these two persons said they had come from a strange city in the midst of the desert: one was unusually tall; both had long noses and a western type of face. The names they had forgotten; but on my suggesting, "Mavrones" and "Baj," they recognised them at once.

"Have I not restored a son to his father? Have I not cowed with one stare the murderers of Peking? Yet who can say that Mozep Kiarsk is haughty in demeanour or impolite to his inferiors?

"The merchants above mentioned bought very large quantities of my Persian silk. The transaction, believe me, my dear friend, was the best they ever conducted in their lives, and they are now on their way to become rich men. All agree that it is the finest silk ever seen in China. I hope you will, in gratitude for my services to your son, spread the knowledge of this article in England. I think the enclosed card might be printed and circulated in all large commercial centres. Mr. Wibbling pretends to be dissatisfied with the language of it: yet I, like yourself, my dear friend, am too good a linguist not to see that the style is both piquant as an advertisement should be, and at the same time dignified and idiomatic. Mr. Wibbling implores me to erase at any rate the expression "I'm jiggered if I don't;" the phrase seems to me very suitable and

strong; but I have consented to leave the treatment of that line in your hands.

"The Panagia be favourable to you in all your dealings.

"Mozep Kiarsk."

P.S. On reading this short note for the fourth time I have decided to enlosé my photograph, taken some years ago in the act of frowning. You will be better able to understand the effect of my glance:

Mozep Kiarsk."

"What is the letter about?" asked Madge, as the old man read it slowly through.

"It is about one of my son's companions. They had some great accident,—some of the people in the desert tried to kill them: and my son with one friend escaped one way, and the other friend escaped another way."

"And didn't they eat any of them?" said Digby, the disappointment this time quite perceptible in his tone.

"No: they didn't eat any body. But this one, Mr. Wibbling, was kept shut up by a man who wanted his money in China. I'll tell you all about it afterwards."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, for a certain seriousness had fallen over them after the first blush of excitement at the good news. Then Madge rose quietly, and crept close up to the handsome old weather-beaten face.

"How glad you must be?" she said—"Are you so glad you'd like us to go away and leave you alone?"

"No: I am so glad I should like you both to come in and have tea with me. So come along, and we'll ask Aunt Martha."

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